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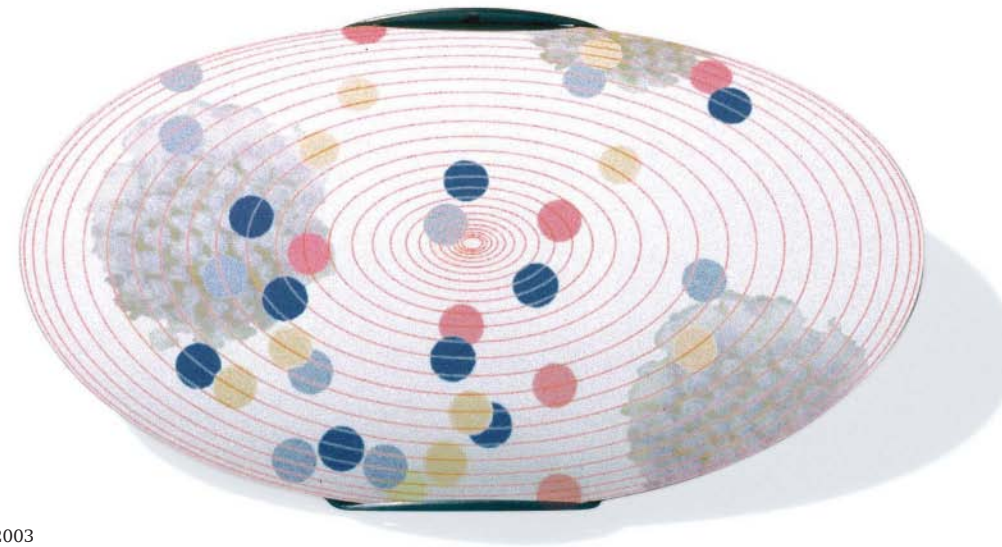

NORMAN WEBER
House and Garden #17, 2003
silver, steel, digital print
4 ¾ x 2 ¾ x ⅝"
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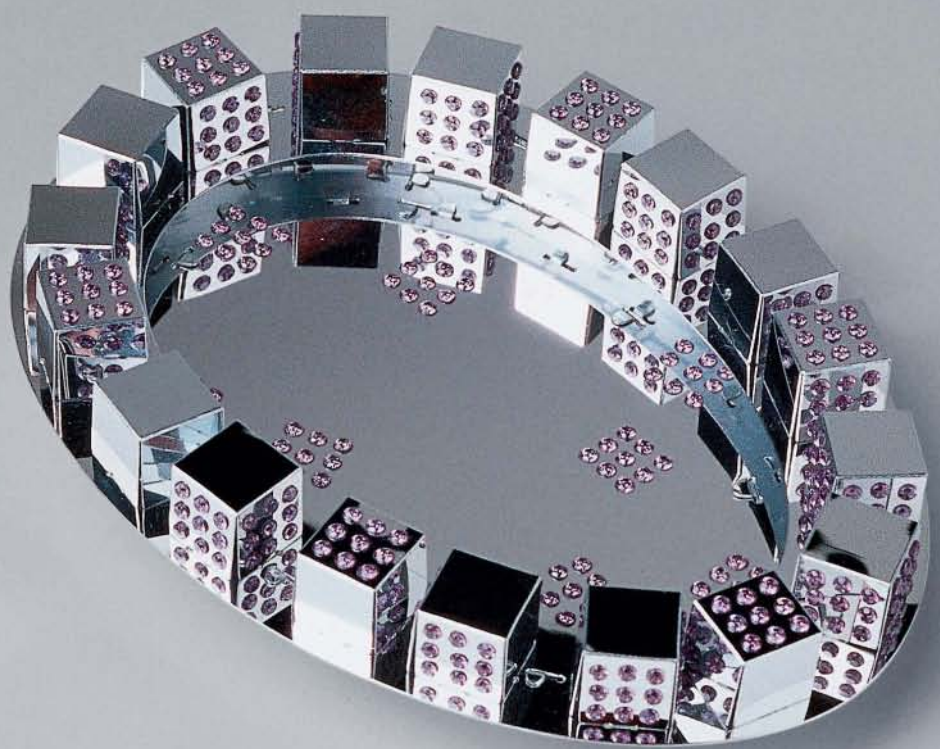
Cover:
FUMIKI TAGUCHI
Kogane of Expression (brooch), 2015
18k gold
4 ¾ x 1 ¾ x 1 ⅛"
(SEE FEATURE ON PAGE 36)

ornamentum



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LOYAL READERS MAY recall that our Spring issue was dubbed "Women in Metal," as a nod to the high concentration of women makers and subjects. Now it's the men's turn to shine. Many of this issue's articles address male adornment, including belt buckles, insignia, and military ornament.

While belts are now commonly worn by both sexes, they have their historical roots in men's fashion. Sited at the center of the body, above the groin, belt buckles are well placed to broadcast one's status and prowess, whether one is a cowboy or CEO. As Emily Stoehrer's article reveals, contemporary metalsmiths are transforming this traditional emblem of masculinity into an expressive and provocative canvas.

The Staffordshire Hoard, showcased here, is a seventh-century Anglo Saxon trove of sumptuous warrior bling. Discovered in 2009 in England, the hoard comprises some 4,000 gold and garnet fragments, primarily fittings for swords, knives, helmets and shields. While mystery and speculation still swirl around the find, there is no doubt that this bejeweled finery once bedecked the weaponry and armor of mighty war leaders.

Harking back to the past, cover artist Fumiko Taguchi's jewelry often takes the form of family crests or coats of arms. In both shape and radiance, these works project power and wealth, an effect achieved through Taguchi's trompe-l'oeil technique of carving metal to resemble encrusted diamonds.

There is something for everyone in Norman Weber's virtuoso work, although male physiology rules in his *Penis Badge* and sperm-fringed brooch, *Eternally Yours*. Weber's iconography stretches to embrace pop culture, childhood memories, gardens, and history. Beneath his diverse subjects and stylistic playfulness, Weber is driven by a delight in ornament and a romantic belief in the power of jewelry to connect all people, men and women alike...

SUZANNE RAMLJAK
EDITOR

The mission of *Metalsmith* magazine is to document, analyze, and promote excellence in jewelry and metalsmithing. In fulfillment of the goal of producing a significant document of the field, editorial content will emphasize contemporary activities and ideas, with supportive content to include relevant historical work and critical issues.

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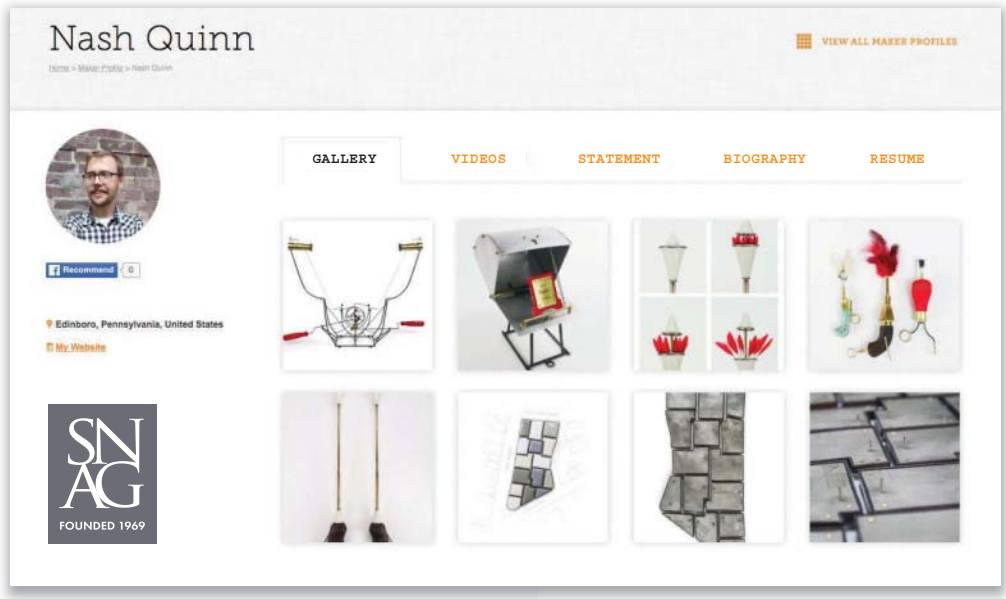

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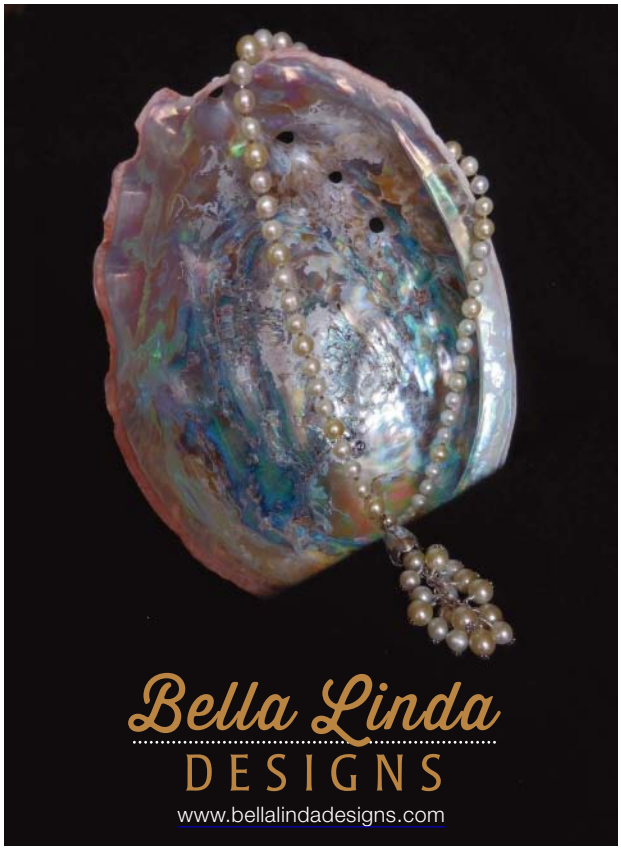

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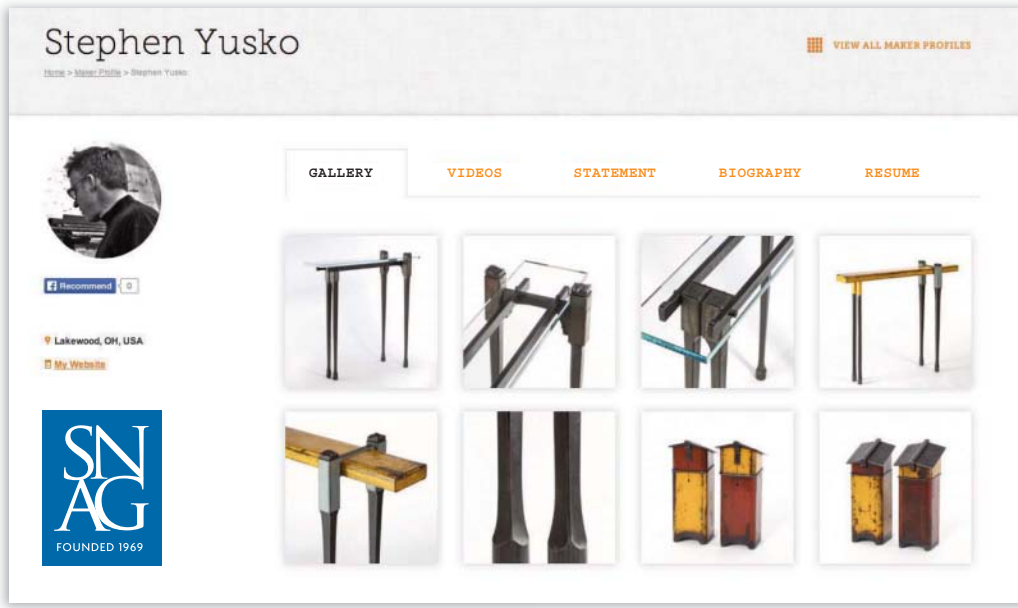

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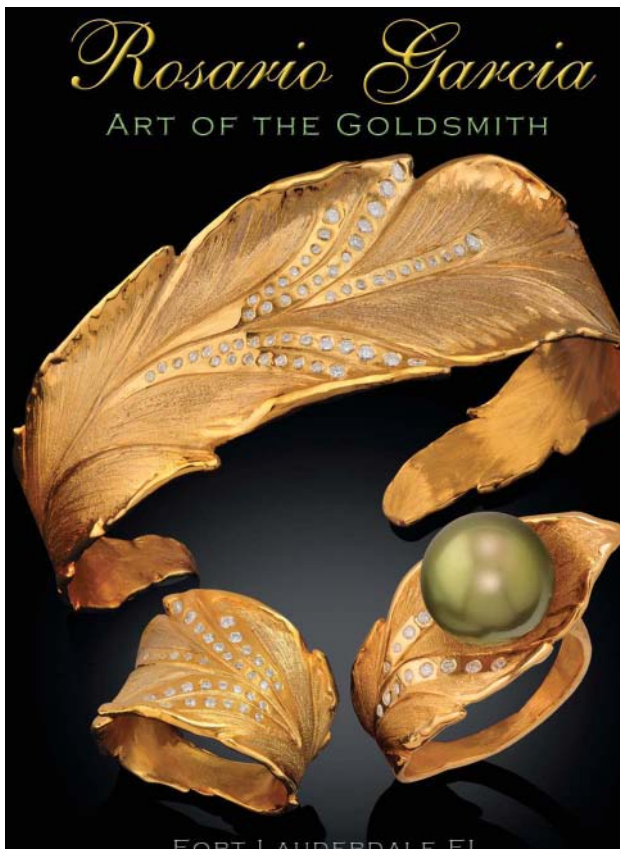
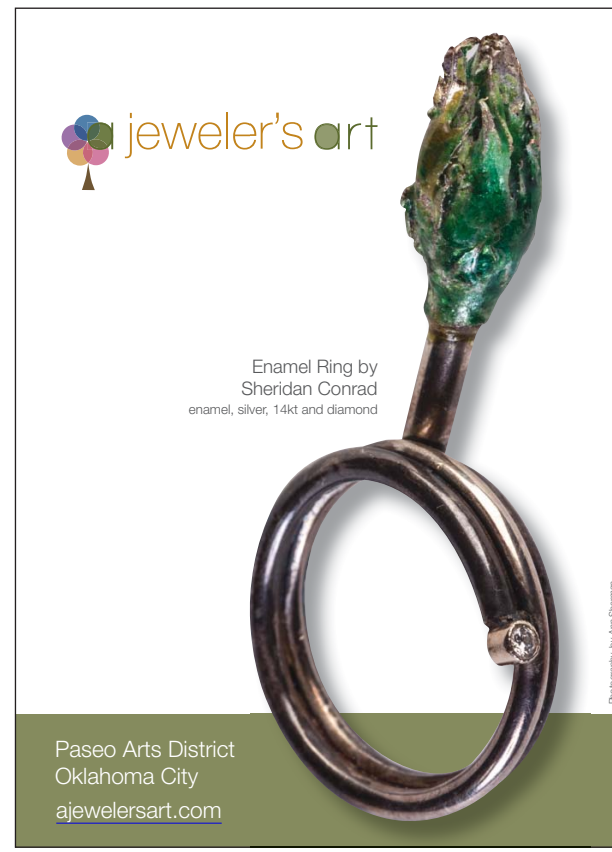


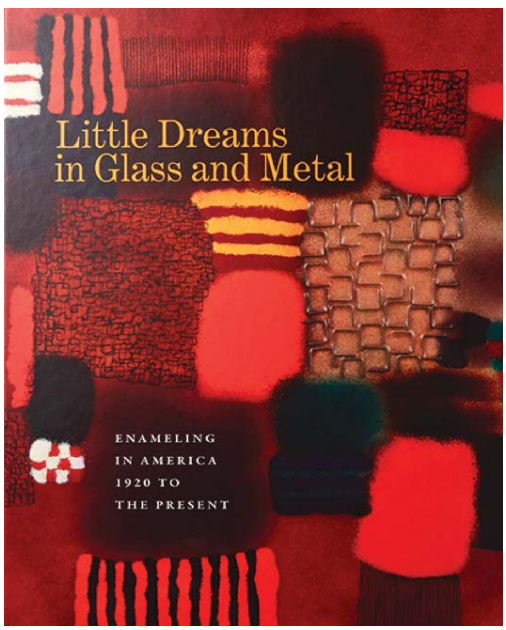


Little Dreams in Glass and Metal: Enameling in America 1920 to the Present

BERNARD N. JAZZAR AND HAROLD B. NELSON
ENAMEL ARTS FOUNDATION, LOS ANGELES, CA 2015
BY MARJORIE SIMON

THE SELF-DEPRECATING title of this catalogue and exhibition, quoted from a letter by enamelist Karl Drerup describing his own work to a client, belies the scope of ideas expressed through American enamels in the past 75 years. The featured artworks have been selected from the personal collection of authors Bernard N. Jazzar and Harold B. Nelson. Longtime enamel devotees, in 2007 they created the Enamel Arts Foundation to rescue enamel works from the dustbin of decorative arts history.

For decades enameling mirrored trends and subjects of fine art: cubism and abstraction, still lifes and liturgical themes. As a craft it has occupied a hybrid position. Increasingly marginalized from painting, poised between ceramics, glassworking, and metalsmithing, enameling has struggled to find a place for exhibition and study. Its technical challenges are great: To successfully create large compositions using liquid or powdered glass whose colors might look nothing like their finished products onto sheets of heavy-gauge copper or steel by repeatedly subjecting them to 1500-degree kiln temperatures is monumentally difficult. At one time enameling's prevalence in the fine and decorative arts was much greater than it is now, with bowls and plaques routinely offered for sale at fine department stores such as Neiman Marcus and Marshall Field, as well as New York galleries. In 1959 even the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (now MAD) mounted an enamel exhibition of nearly 400 objects by more than 72 artists.

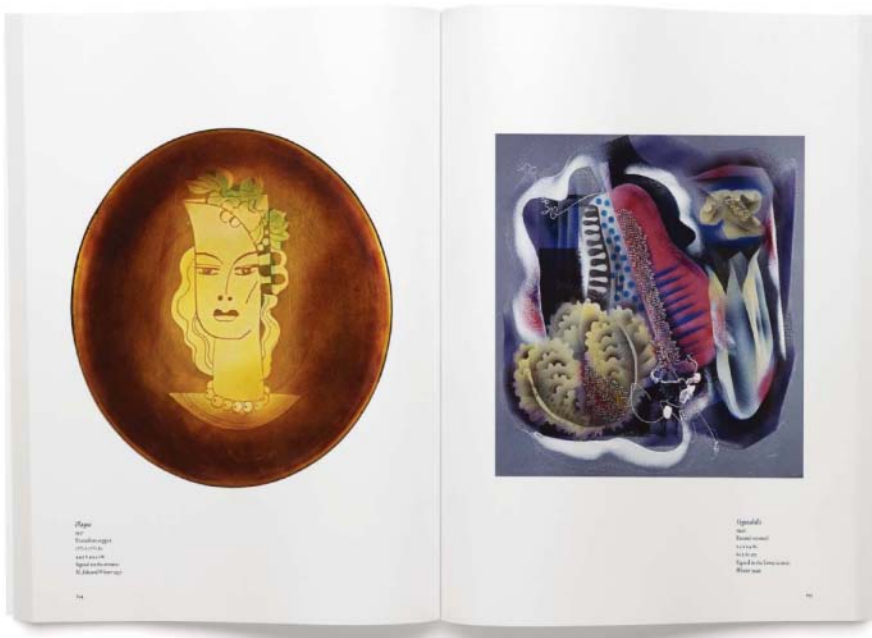


The book's strength is the documentation of early- to mid-20th-century American enameling in all its forms; its weakness is the relative absence of recent work. Much of the work shown is at least 50 years old, and even living artists are represented by work from 20 to 30 years ago. Yet most of the midcentury work is so strong that it is only when compared with contemporary surveys such as *500 Enameled Objects* (2009), the *Metalsmith EIP* of 2003, and the biennial catalogues of the Enamelist Society, that you realize how much has been left out. That said, I wouldn't have missed learning about Joseph Trippetti (born 1923) and his de Chirico–like arches and shadows, or the tantalizingly brief mention of John Stenvall (1907–98). Likewise, Paul Hultberg's experiments with firescale or Jade Snow Wong's luminous plates absolutely should not be overlooked.

The book's strength is the documentation of early- to mid-20th-century American enameling in all its forms

The catalogue writing is straightforward, the text legible, the glossary helpful, and the images, though they do not do justice to the sparkle of the large-scale panels, are good enough to convey the special properties of glass on metal. An alphabetical listing of artists allows the reader to easily find any name, but chronological organization would have allowed for greater appreciation of the medium's evolution, as well as its place vis-a-vis contemporaneous art movements. There is, as always in catalogues, the problem of scale. Small brooches are rendered nearly the same size as plates a foot or more in diameter. Thankfully, several pullout pages are granted to large horizontal works, such as a 1965 two-part autumn scene by Helen Trivigno, glittering with paillons of gold and silver foil on amber tones.

There is much to learn from early masters such as Fred Ball, whose 1972 book *Experimental Techniques in Enameling* still circulates in pirated photocopies, and whose experiments with over-fired white enamel on steel and copper still seem radical. Notable among contemporary works are haunting abstractions with liquid enamel on steel by Helen Elliott, cloisonne on hand-raised copper and silver



vessels by both Harlan Butt and Sarah Perkins, a gold brooch by Jamie Bennett, and an elegiac series of wall plaques by Gretchen Goss featuring photo transfer images of trees.

As a foundational document of American 20th-century enamelwork, *Little Dreams* best serves those practitioners and collectors who share the authors' aesthetics. This is not necessarily a criticism, for it gathers in one volume the best and brightest homegrown voices of their time, revealing one more aspect of our shared history.

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith and writer based in Philadelphia.

Kaminer Haislip
Southern Silver

BY ANDREA DINOTO

FROM ELEGANT SILVER tableware, to artful jewelry and gifts, Southern-born Kaminer Haislip's portfolio impresses with its diversity and sleek, hand-wrought designs. "I do no casting," says the Charleston-based metalsmith. "Every piece is entirely handmade by me." Since Haislip launched her business in 2005, she has gained wide attention in Southern media, but also nationally as a 2015 award finalist in the Martha Stewart American Made program, which spotlights local entrepreneurs engaged in quality craftsmanship around the country.

A native of Aiken, South Carolina, Haislip knew in high school that she wanted to "make things." In shop class, she says, "I was the only girl, and I learned to weld." Her family's third-generation appliance and hardware business provided her with a repairs workshop in which to indulge her passion, and she often drove around in her father's truck to scout metal scraps for making small sculptures.

Kaminer Haislip (left) with guest at the reception for "An Eye for Opulence: Charleston through the Lens of the Rivers Collection" at the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, FL.
PHOTO: CARRIE BRADBURN, CAPEHART PHOTOGRAPHY

"I try not to take my silversmithing knowledge for granted," Haislip says, "and I want to educate people on how my objects are made."

At Winthrop University in South Carolina, Haislip studied with the acclaimed British silversmith Alfred Ward, earning both a cum laude BFA in Jewelry and Metals in 2002 and an MFA in Silversmithing and Design in 2005. In that same year, she moved to Charleston with her boyfriend (now husband), where she lives and works out of a studio in the Redux Contemporary Art Center in the downtown area. Haislip notes that from colonial times up to the Civil War, Charleston was an historic center for silversmithing, with dozens of silver shops furnishing luxury items for wealthy landowners. Today, she says, the now-booming tourist hub is "a thriving city that I am so proud to be part of."

Starting out in business, Haislip's main investment, she says, was her website, which she continually updates and enhances. Initially she posted images of one of-a-kind hollowware and objects plus "custom jewelry on commission," but when the 2008 recession caused the cost of silver to spike, she saw the need for more of a variety of price points. In 2009 she introduced a line of production hollowware, and soon after, production jewelry. In 2013 she added a "Shop" department to her website, and more recently a virtual tour of her studio, in which she displays her tools and explains the different techniques required for fabrication and raising. "I try not to take my silversmithing knowledge for granted," Haislip says, "and I want to educate people on how my objects are made." It is through social media, she says, "that I create a window into my studio that connects the process with the finished product." It's an effective approach: "As soon as I post images of new work on Facebook and Instagram," she says, "the pieces usually sell out quickly."

Haislip admits that her training taught her everything except how to run a business. But she followed her savvy instincts and began by sending out emails, press releases, and photos to magazines, galleries, and craft exhibitions that she thought would be interested in her work. This effort gained her stories in magazines such as

Corresponding to an Echo asit Travels (Coffeepot III), 2010
silver, purple-heart wood
height 10"

Magnolia Bowl
for Draper James, 2015
sterling silver
diameter 4"

Southern Living, Charleston, and *Garden & Gun,* a well-known ("at least in the South," says Haislip) publication aimed at a high-end clientele, which in 2012 chose Haislip for its prestigious "Made in the South" design award. "Reese Witherspoon found me through *Garden & Gun,*" says Haislip, referring to the actress's newly formed Southern lifestyle company, Draper James; for its online shop, she was commissioned to make a sterling silver bowl in the form of a four-inch-diameter magnolia blossom, the South's iconic flower. Haislip's work was subsequently mentioned in *Women's Wear Daily, Forbes,* and *Architectural Digest.*

Haislip is an exhibitor at several ACC craft shows each year, and has participated in numerous juried exhibitions at venues such as the Mint Museum of Craft & Design in Charlotte, NC, and at the Metal Museum in Memphis, TN, for their 2015 *Hollowware* show. She has also exhibited abroad, in the Netherlands, Germany, and in Belgium at the Design Museum Ghent. Last year, Haislip was one of four Charlestonians chosen to exhibit in Palm Beach, FL, at "An Eye for Opulence: Charleston through the Lens of the Rivers Collection," a historical presentation of more than 100 antique and contemporary objects representing that city's remarkable decorative arts tradition. Among the items in Haislip's display were jewelry, bowls, pitchers, and a ten-inch-high silver coffee pot with a sculpted purple heartwood handle and finial. Although not a retail show, the exhibition was an opportunity to meet potential buyers, several of whom she directed to her website. "I gave many people my card," she says, "and I hope that I have attracted a new audience for my work." She adds: "Silversmithing is a dying art that I am keeping alive through my business and passion for the craft."

Andrea DiNoto writes about art, craft, and design.

Furthermore:
www.kaminerhaislip.com

From the Tribe

BY WENDY YOTHERS

IN MY PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY jewelry is fashion: it is a reflection of art in New York City museums, it is costume—and it is how we mark our tribe. The pieces I have chosen all exhibit a sense of delight in "making." And they each tell a story.

St. Benedict's Ring, by Thomas Gerald Irizarry, is inscribed, "Vade retro satana" (Step back, Satan). St. Benedict was the first exorcist, and the ring is a contemporary talisman to protect its wearer on the streets and in the subways. Hilary Barrett's necklace also has a talismanic quality, evoking tusks and hair, and carrying a not quite-legible incantation.

The costume elements in *The Invisible Warrior Within You* by Agustina Alcorta and the *Tiara* by Erika Tsunoda blur the lines between metalsmithing and wearable fashion. Aside from being personal statements about power and mortality, they are apparel. They fit their makers—and they work.

Juliana Gatt-Eichwald's brooch turns reticulated silver into a metaphor for water, in a visual quote reminiscent of Hokusai's woodblock print *The Great Wave.* Jia Min Zhu's *Demeter* earrings have figures morphing out of metal, climbing chains to reach an earlobe, each becoming more recognizable the higher they climb. Sung Ya Huang's *Bicycle Earrings* look like ears themselves, bending and abstracted. The *Morning Dew* necklace by Maisha Dang-Owoabi combines diaphanous plastic and orthodox silver.

The preciousness of these objects—with the exception of the diamond-bladed sterling pizza cutter by Eric Moultrie—is derived from the story they tell. The craftsmanship renders the objects intimate and eloquent.

Wendy Yothers is a professional silversmith, artist, process methods engineer, and current chairman of the Jewelry Design Department at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City.

THOMAS GERALD IRIZARRY
St. Benedict's Ring, 2015
silver, pewter
¾ x 1 x ¼"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

HILARY BARRETT
Necklace, 2015
silver, nickel, copper, brass, natural fiber
pendant 2 x 2 x ¼"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

AGUSTINA ALCORTA
The Invisible Warrior Within You, 2014
copper
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

SUNG YA HUANG
Bicycle Earrings, 2015
silver, filament
length 2"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

JULIANA GATT-EICHWALD
Brooch, 2015
sterling silver
¾ x ¾"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

ERIC MOULTRIE
Pizza Cutter, 2016
silver, steel, diamonds
3 x 6"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

ERIKA TSUNODA
Tiara, 2014
copper, acrylic
diameter 7"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

MAISHA DANG-OWOLABI
Dew of Summer, 2015
acrylic, silver
length 18"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

JIA MIN ZHU
Demeter, 2015
brass
length 2"
PHOTO: ALESANDRO CASAGLI

Linda Threadgill

BY ELIZABETH MCDEVITT

AT THE END of a winding road through piñon-studded hills, artist Linda Threadgill and her husband Jim have created an environment of inspired beauty and creativity. About 11 years ago they found in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a perfect escape from the cold northern climate of the upper Midwest, where Linda had directed the Metal Arts program at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater for 25 years. The couple designed both the home and studio in traditional Santa Fe style, and the property sits atop a hill with a panoramic view of the surrounding mountains (the Sangre de Cristo, Ortiz, Sandia, and Cerrillos ranges). Within its gated walls are a lovely native garden, and a private inner patio with a view of the surrounding hills and valleys that goes on for miles, to the very southern tip of the Rocky Mountains. Not surprisingly, even the light fixtures in the patio and the hardware on the doors to the studio were designed and made by Linda herself.

Linda Threadgill holding a four-foot-tall jewelers saw.

My midwinter visit there coincided with the return of a large body of work from "Master Metalsmith: Linda Threadgill, Cultivating Ornament," her recent show at the Metal Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. Although I had seen pictures of Linda's work, I had no clear sense of the grand scale of the mixed-metal pieces that seeing them in person afforded. Candlesticks were large sculptures emerging from rhythmic tangles of textured leaves and pods; trays were monumental presentation pieces of huge abstract floral ornament overflowing from their surfaces. Chalice-like cups and bowls rose from stalks resembling plants from another realm: sharp, intricate, and organic forms that begged to be admired, but not touched. Other vessel forms stood atop architecturally strong heavy-gauge bronze. In a large frame on one of the living room walls hung a collection of intricately textured and brightly colored "Rosette Brooches," organic, yet stylized imaginary flowers in various stages of growth and decay. These and many other works displayed the technical and artistic virtuosity that is Linda Threadgill's hallmark.

Not surprisingly, even the light fixtures in the patio and the hardware on the doors to the studio were designed and made by Linda herself.

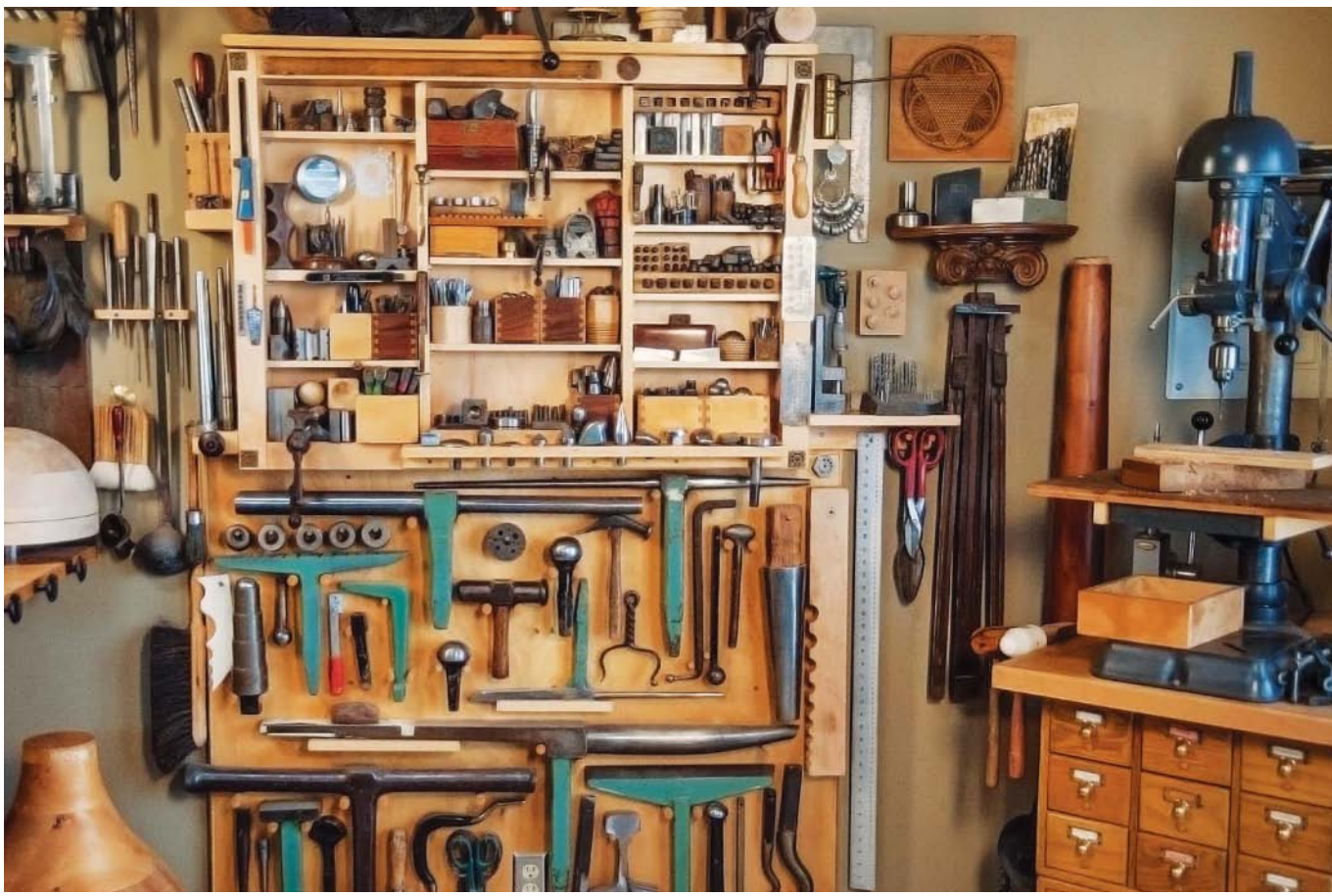
A tour of her studio complex, up a short flight of stone steps in the garden, provided insight into Linda's creative process. "Overwhelmed" is the word that best describes my initial reaction. A four-foot-tall jewelers saw frame, referencing signs used in Colonial times, hung outside the entry, advertising her "trade" as a metal artist. What was even more surprising was that the saw frame, expertly constructed by her husband Jim, was functional…. for a giant hand! The first room I entered looked like it doubled as a tool museum: hundreds of antique tools of all kinds, measuring instruments, a series of small turning mills that were used at one time to turn edges on sheet metal, beautiful handmade wood planes, numerous large steel raising stakes and hammers, large machinery (lathe, rolling mill, drill press, anvils, and vises) and giant wooden plumb bobs were all artfully displayed in wooden wall mounts and cases custom made by Jim. At this point I realized that Linda and Jim work together as a team in studio and concept design.

Not to be ignored is Jim's beautifully equipped woodworking studio, adjacent to hers. Jim can make just about anything Linda needs, including large wooden lathe-turned forms—for vessel construction, and a huge wooden donut for the base of the largest pitch bowl I have ever seen—and does so with both skill and humor.

Resting against Linda's jeweler's bench was another giant tool: a three-foot-tall functional ring clamp! The jeweler's bench was custom made by Jim as well, and outfitted with multiple shallow drawers

opposite:
Threadgill's custom-designed jeweler's bench in her Santa Fe studio.

An assortment of forming tools in Threadgill's studio.



Assorted tools for measurement, edge turning, and lathe work.

The drawing and design area of Threadgill's studio.

to hold some of the innumerable tools and components that her complex work requires. Above it on the wall is a series of framed French 18th-century prints, detailing tools and workshops of a bygone era. Although Linda's work is produced using contemporary and technologically advanced processes, her appreciation of the history of her craft is apparent everywhere. Above her drafting table in this brightly lit studio are 19th-century botanical illustrations of plants and seedpods, which are hand colored in tones that resemble some of her abstract flower brooches. Drawings and models of plant forms cover the table, providing further insight into her design process. Linda's work incorporates multiple repetitive shapes, many of which she forms in wax and casts in bronze and silver, and some in precious metal clay (bronze, silver, and steel). In the center of the room is a large, heavy printmaker's worktable, displaying numerous layered flower brooch forms in various stages of development. Linda works in series, and in the drawers below she sorts and stores hundreds of components, many of which are intricately textured,

Linda's mastery of tools and process has undoubtedly enabled her to create a complex and somewhat mysterious body of work.

Object: Blossfeldt Candelabrum, 2015
sterling silver, bronze,
24k gold and silver plate
15 x 12 x 12"
PHOTO: JAMES THREADGILL

etched, pierced, and formed by hand. Whether large or small, Linda's work requires multiple techniques. Larger, more sculptural pieces incorporate ¼-inch- and ⅛-inch-thick brass and bronze, which because of its thickness is custom cut by water jet in nearby Albuquerque. The precision of the cuts results in both positive and negative shapes, both of which are used in her work.

As a professor of metal arts for more than two decades, Linda had to become conversant in many processes. Early in her career, she took a machining class which freed her to design and make many of her own tools, including a studio-size spray etching machine modeled after commercial units. This technique yields a cleaner and more precise surface than traditional etching. Because this process requires adequate ventilation, it is done in a separate, detached studio, in which she can also do wax burnout for casting. Linda's mastery of tools and process has undoubtedly enabled her to create a complex and somewhat mysterious body of work. In Linda's words: "Having the ability to design tooling is ironically what frees one from technique. This allows you to concentrate on concepts, without the constraints of technical convention or preconceptions about material. In a way, mastering process allows you to forget about it." Linda was "happy to retire" from teaching so that she could concentrate on her own work. Technically accomplished and prolific, she and Jim have found the perfect combination of isolation and inspiration. The energy of nature and the sharp light and clear air of New Mexico are elements of this beautifully integrated live/work space; perhaps not so surprising in a state officially called the "Land of Enchantment."

Corbeille, 2015
sterling silver, bronze, silver plate
13 ½ x 12 x 6"
PHOTO: JAMES THREADGILL

Elizabeth McDevitt is a studio goldsmith and jewelry historian based in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Furthermore:
www.lindathreadgill.com

Norman Weber

Flocked Ralls #7 (ring), 2014
silver, goldplated, plastic, flock, 18k gold
1 ½ x 1 ⅞ x 3 ¾"

The Shock of the Now

BY ANDREA DINOTO

Grusse Dich (Hello) (necklace), 1994
sterling silver, 18k gold
length 28 ½"

Auf Ewig Dein (Eternally Yours) (brooch), 1992
plastic, lacquer, silver
3 ¾ x 3 ½ x 1 ⅜"

Tumbtum (brooch), 1992
plastic, pigment, steel, garnets, gold
3 ½ x 2 ¾ x 2 ½"

A TRIP TO GERMANY was out of the question, so instead I visited Ornamentum Gallery in Hudson, New York, where owner Stefan Friedman had agreed to talk to me about Norman Weber, a jewelry artist known widely abroad—less so here—for his artfully eccentric and formally diverse oeuvre. Ornamentum had recently presented "NOW: 20 Years Norman Weber Part 1,"[1] a retrospective of his work, at the Collective Design Fair in New York. When I arrived at the gallery, 13 pieces from that curated exhibition had been set out for me to examine.[2] My hand went automatically to a shiny black plastic brooch in the shape of an upside-down heart. This voluptuous, decorative, and intriguing piece was fringed with sprightly, sperm-like ornaments and bannered with the sentiment *Auf Ewig Dein* (*Eternally Yours;* 1992). Because of its inverted position, Friedman pointed out, the heart was intended to subtly suggest a butt, and as such was an example of Weber's self-described "playful eroticism." Next to it was another black brooch, *Penisier Orden* (*Penis Badge,* 1992) in which somewhat menacing squiggles frame a gold and garnet center. As I would learn, these were but two of Weber's several brooches in which anatomical parts are either vaguely implied (*Rosentau/Rose Dew, 1992*) or more graphically suggested (*Tumbtum, 1992*), each adorned with garnets set in gold. What next?

As I glanced at the other jewels surrounding these visually potent pieces, I was struck by how distinctly different one was from another: evidence of Weber's formal virtuosity and prodigious technical skill. Pendants were patterned with silkscreen printing on metal, or laser etching on plastic; two flocked ping pong balls provided the surreal jewels for blingy gold rings; a necklace of silver discs featured the subtlest of wax-cast brushstrokes. Weber uses a repertoire of these and other techniques, combined with masterful metalwork, to investigate multiple themes and genres drawn both from material culture and his own "personal mythology," as one of his series is titled. His approach can be sculptural, painterly, constructivist, or architectural according to how he conceives of his pieces: mainly brooches, but also rings, pendants, earrings, and a recent series of remarkable "colliers" in the form of linked discs, each of which functions as a canvas for painting, graphic design, and photography.

One could say that, for Weber, jewelry was destiny. He was born in 1964 in Schwabisch Gmund, Germany, a center for silver and gold handcraft since the 14th century. He studied for four years at the State College for Glass and Jewelry in Kaufbeuren-Neugablonz, Germany, where he has taught since 2011. The city is an important center for the manufacture of costume jewelry, a genre that ranks high among his many interests. (He once spent several months working in one of the city's factories.) Among Weber's notable awards and honors was his appointment, for the year 2011, as City Goldsmith of Schwabisch Gmund.

Also, inevitably, one might say, Weber is an alumnus of the Munich Fine Art Academy, where he studied in the Masters program from 1989 to 1996 under professors Hermann Junger, Otto Kunzli, and Horst Sauerbruch. Like numerous fellow graduates of the Academy, Weber took a conceptual

Such interplay of real and fake, past and present, is the recurring motif that runs through Weber's art

Rosentau/Rose Dew (brooch), 1992
gold, plastic, pigment, haematites, steel
3 x 3 x 2"

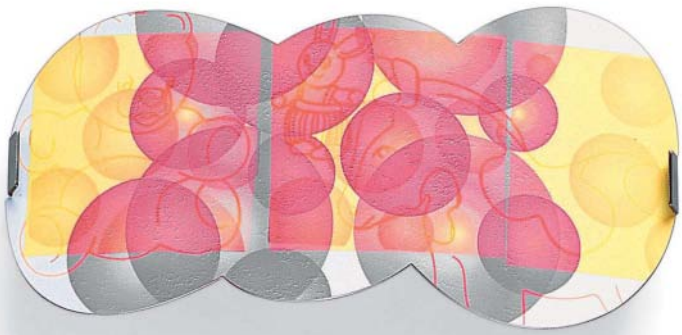
Penisier Orden (Penis Badge), 1992
plastic, lacquer, spring steel, garnets, 18k gold
3 x 2 ⅜ x 2"

approach to jewelrymaking that reveals, in his case, art-world preoccupations with constructivism, surrealism, Pop art, semiotics, and memoir. His pieces can be bold and eye-dazzling, or minimally scaled and visually understated. But regardless of size or concept, a Weber jewel is invariably produced with a touch of irony, poetic inflection, and, as in the case of the inverted heart, true sentiment. One such piece is *Grusse Dich* (*Hello;* 1994), a necklace made from a tangle of silver and gold chains and other jewelry. As one lifts this piece, unaware of its inspiration, one unconsciously shares Weber's own memory of looking through his mother's jewelry box. "When I tried to remove one piece," he says, "a whole cluster of jewelry would emerge, the pieces interlocked and hanging on each other." Weber was fascinated by the "composition of chance," in which real and imitation became entwined. While *Hello* appears to be a random assemblage, it is of course nothing of the kind. With the exception of one chain, each item is a handmade dummy jewel, including what Weber describes as a "playful allusion" to Gerd Rothmann, the esteemed German jeweler known for his fingerprint motifs in gold. In addition to the "Rothmann" ring, Weber added a tiny gold heart pendant that refers back to *Auf Ewig Dein,* but this time right side up. What this necklace is about, says Weber, is how all the different pieces "communicate among each other."

Such interplay of real and fake, past and present, is the recurring motif that runs through Weber's art. In *NOW: Jewels by Norman Weber,* the catalogue[3] for the artist's 2010 three-city exhibition in Germany, Bernhart Schwenk, curator of contemporary art at Pinakothek de Moderne, Munich, observed that the artist's work "is a play on fleeting entities…" and that Weber "is concerned with the aura of a piece of jewellery as spiritual and intellectual energy: as memory, as wish, as the idea of possibilities."[4] This fascination with illusion and longing is evident in the "Object" series, for which Weber constructed faux found objects from stainless steel, finishing their surfaces to a rusted-iron trompe l'oeil effect of age and use. They appear to be vaguely functional, with their boxy tabbed construction and shapes suggestive of little mechanical devices: one resembles a coin holder; another a timer bearing the letters L-O-V-E, with the O a golden button. But what these pendants actually "do" is provoke a fake déjà vu experience in the viewer, a feeling that maybe we've seen—or even owned—such things before. Lest we think of them as mere objects, though, Weber adds touches of gold because, as he told me via e-mail, "only through this do they become wearable."

While these real/faux objects remain fanciful and illusory, actual artifacts from Weber's childhood provide the visual basis for two related series, "Private Mythology" and "House and Garden." In the former, images of his parents, of stuffed animals, a playpen, and his father's chair are laser-etched on white plastic discs, which are then framed in silver and set with brightly colored glass stones from the '60s and '70s, which in turn allude to his love and appreciation of costume jewelry. As with "Objects," Weber lacquers and sands the metal to impart the appearance of vintage, if not ancient, artifact. The warmth and gentleness of these nostalgic pieces, reminiscent of dreamlike children's book illustrations, contrasts dramatically with the cool abstractions of "House and Garden," for which Weber used photos, his own and his mother's, of details of his parents'

Object #7 (pendant), 2001
stainless steel, lacquer, 18k gold
4 ⅛ x ½ x 3 ½"

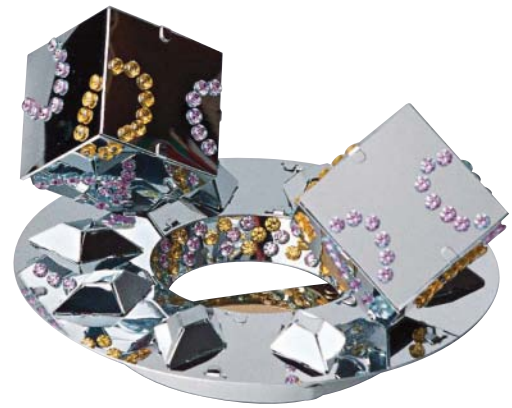


House and Garden #18 (brooch), 2003
silver, steel, C-print
4 ⅞ x 2 ½ x ⅞"

Flock Balls #4 (brooch), 2014
silver, plastic, flock, steel
4 ⅝ x 2 ⅞ x 3 ½"

Private Mythology #1 (pendant), *2001*
nickel silver, plastic, lacquer, glass
4 ⅜ x 3 x ⅞"

Dazzler #4 (brooch), 1997
aluminum, synthetic stones, gold
4 ½ x 3 ¾ x 2 ⅜"



home. Images of wallpaper, carpet patterns, toys, and such were then Photoshopped into unrecognizable patterns, which were transferred as digital images onto shaped metal plates held by oxidized silver structures. Dating from the early 2000s, these brooches, pendants, and rings—with their precisely engineered constructions supporting minimalist designs—are among Weber's most striking modernist work.

But Weber is essentially a postmodernist who relishes the use of funk, flash, and Pop to make his points. His "Flock" series, in which he uses the age-old texturizing technique, comes as a shock, as flocking conjures images of cheap packaging and bourgeois simulations of velvet and brocade, mainly on wallpaper. Nevertheless, Weber applies it in candy colors to thin aluminum sheets for a collection of "big but light" mechanistic flower brooches—some of which bear the names "Imagination," "Classic," and "Valuable"— whose meticulous construction incorporates synthetic stones, steel, and gold. The curator Ellen Maurer Zilioli, in her catalogue essay "Hot Stuff,"[5] notes that "flock covers the metal blooms like fine fur, like moss," calling the objects "bold, powerful, majestic," but also "at times grotesque, at others bizarre or even eccentric outgrowths of Weber's phantasmagoric botany of jewelry." But these pieces appear downright sedate next to Weber's recent collection of gold rings and brooches mounted with flocked ping pong balls in clusters of two or three. These surreal, near-weightless baubles invite comparison to bubble gum balls and soap bubbles, but also to mega-jewels and molecular structures—atoms at play, perhaps, in yet another example of Weber's mastery of illusion and irony, his playful challenge to the wearer to embrace art as value, not vice versa.

Weber is essentially a postmodernist who relishes the use of funk, flash, and Pop to make his points.

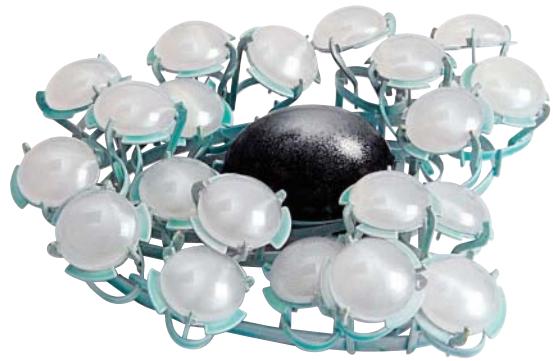
The challenge is implicit, as well, with the "Dazzler" (*Glanzstuck*) series from the late 1990s, together with "Show-Piece" (*Schaustuck, 2007–2009*), two bodies of work—shown in full in his book—that interpret the fabulous in jewelry variously with fantastical daring and sculptural élan. For the "Dazzlers," Weber works in starchitectural/constructivist mode to create large brooches of highly reflective aluminum set with glittery synthetic stones. Pristine cubes or Gehryesque fluted structures are mounted flat or angled on bejeweled bases, suggesting radiant, futuristic cityscapes that, in Munich University's professor of literature Barbara Vinken's phrase, "flaunt artificiality."[6] By using the same tabbed sheet-metal process he employed for "Objects" and "Flock," Weber, says Vinken, reveals "skilled goldsmithing that cleverly conceals its artistry in order to state it all the more effectively." With "Show-Pieces," Weber disguises huge free-wheeling body sculptures as brooches and bangles that incorporate plastic stones and beads in silver settings. Though plastic, these faceted and cabochon jewels—as accents in metal armatures or set in gigantic pavé—assume an uncanny elegance, another instance of Weber as master of the fake.

With the "Portraits" series, settings become the jewel itself, complex bejeweled screens behind which Weber sets faded images of the Pop icons Barbie, Big Jim, and Dr. Steel so as to appear either receding or looming in memory. The largest of these oversize pieces, simply titled Portrait #7,

Untitled (necklace), 2010
sterling silver, silkscreen on plastic
7 ⅞ x 11"

Portrait #7 (brooch), 2008
silver, plastic skulls, lacquer, digital print
5 7/8 x 4 3/8 x 1 7/8"

Show Piece #1, 2007–2009
silver, plastic stones, lacquer
4 7/8 x 4 3/8 x 1 7/8"



is a roughly 4-by-5-inch brooch—admittedly unwearable, says Weber—whose frame is constructed as a children's roundabout, its silver rails colored pink and mounted with nine pink plastic skulls with the sugary aspect of macabre all-day suckers. In the center, a floating silver disc—a trampoline?—bears a digital print of disembodied pink lips, evocative of Man Ray's surrealist painting *The Lovers*—or is it simply a lipstick blot on a tissue? Or are these Barbie's lips? (Weber says yes; blonde Barbie.) It doesn't matter, because in considering the layered meanings of this memento mori, all interpretations are possible, and even probable in a piece that so deftly balances allusions to iconic art, popular culture and found objects within one meticulously constructed object. But it deserves a better title: Childhood's End?

Weber's interest in such dramatic sculptural narratives in no way negates his focus on more conventional jewelry forms. His colliers, he points out, "belong to my exploration of precious (stone) jewelry," in which he uses different methods to reference images of tradition jewelry. *Untitled, 1995,* one of two colliers I viewed at Ornamentum, is comprised of 11 silver discs, each of which displays a faint brushstroke, achieved by removing wax prior to casting, but the result is the illusion of an addition—Weber's real/fake dichotomy in action.[7] With the stunning *Untitled, 2010,* the collier has evolved into a deconstructed canvas for multimedia art. Each disc is a silkscreen print on plastic of "disappeared" images of jewelry overlaid with stripes of color "to give the effect of a fading memory," in Weber's words.

Weber's interest in such dramatic sculptural narratives in no way negates his focus on more conventional jewelry forms.

What seems to unite Weber's varied and many collections is a streak of romanticism that posits an emotional connection—through jewelry—to art and life, and assumes the artist's task to be a perpetual seeking of expressive forms in which to unite material and spiritual realities. In 2008, Otto Kunzli put it more succinctly, in stating the central thesis that governs his own philosophy of art and teaching: "We are proud to be applied artists in the sense that we see our strength in the specific link between objects and humans, a feature which is quite unique to jewellery."[8] Weber would surely concur.

Andrea DiNoto is a New York–based writer on art, craft and design.

1. May 13-17, 2015, followed by gallery installation through June 20. "NOW" is Weber's signature, a translation of the German "jetzt" ("now" or "of the moment").
2. Pursuant to my gallery visit, Weber answered questions about his work via email, as he was leaving for the "Body Alchemy" show in Hangzhou, China. Quotes are drawn from that conversation and from the gallery's website.
3. Zilioli, Ellen Maurer (ed.) *NOW: Jewels by Norman Weber.* Essays by Ellen Maurer Zilioli, Berhart Shwenk, and Barbara Vinken. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, Stuttgart, 2010.
4. Ibid., p. 134.
5. Ibid., p. 10.
6. Ibid., p. 41
7. That it bears comparison with Gerd Rothmann's gold fingerprint disc necklaces is not surprising, as Weber worked for Rothmann for several months in the mid-1990s and considered his work "an icon for contemporary jewelry for me." So perhaps the brushstrokes are Weber's own gestural fingerprints, an homage to Rothmann.
8. Quoted in www.curatedobject.us. *The Fat Booty of Madness. Jewellery at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich*: The Künzli Class, March 1–May 18, 2008.

White Countenance
(pendants/brooches), 2013
silver, rhodium plating
approx height 4 ¾"

Sleeping Beauties
The Fermenting Jewels of Fumiki Taguchi

BY KATJA TOPORSKI

above:
White Countenance (pendants/brooches), 2014
silver, rhodium plating
7 ¼ x 5 ½ x 1 ½"
COURTESY MICHEKO GALERIE

right:
White Countenance (necklace/brooches), 2014
silver, rhodium plating
17 ¾ x 8 ¼ x 3 ⅛"

IN MARCH 2013 young Japanese jeweler Fumiki Taguchi's otherworldly work was shown for the first time at a Western jewelry event, the highly competitive "Schmuck" exhibition during Munich Jewelry Week. All but unknown beforehand, once he was announced as winning the coveted Herbert Hofmann award with Robert Baines of Australia and Helena Lehtinen of Finland, Taguchi was instantly catapulted into the highest spheres of contemporary art jewelry.

The pendants and brooches Taguchi presented at "Schmuck" in 2013 seem like coats of arms or family crests, with central oval cameos surrounded by ornate interlacing decorations. However, they are created entirely of silver, and their precisely pierced outlines appear somewhat blurred by a deeply textured and highly reflective surface. This texture makes the pieces look as if they were encrusted with diamonds, but it is in fact a trompe l'oeil effect that results from Taguchi's handcarving hundreds of dimples into the metal, so that they refract light like the facets of a gem. Taguchi explained in his statement that jewelry reflects power and wealth in modern Japan, most often

through the presence of precious stones. By creating the illusion of a wealth of gems by carving the metal surface, Taguchi shifts the emphasis of the pieces from jewels to the supporting metal, referencing its inherent preciousness, strength, and delicate beauty.

A necklace from the series titled "White Countenance" is a most stunning example of the application of those techniques. It follows the format of baroque jewelry with its highly ornamented style, voluptuous curves, and floral motifs. However, a closer look reveals an unbelievable complexity of forms and surfaces: each element is composed of multiple layers of pierced silver. Highly polished vines intertwine with abstracted flowers, while a small crest of an eagle spreading its wings nestles in the center. As if this intricacy were not lavish enough, about half of the metal layers display the same sparkly radiance of riches as the brooches in the "Schmuck" exhibition.

The wealth of those layers, their depth, their detail, and unearthly shimmer generates a profusion bordering on decay.

This level of craftsmanship continues to the back of the piece, which reveals the individual elements linked with tiny springs and screws, an impeccable clasp mechanism blending with the rest of the design, and a pin fastening that allows one element at the front to come off and serve as a brooch. Interestingly, the back surfaces are left unpolished, emphasizing the importance of the intensely worked frontal aspect. The wealth of those layers, their depth, their detail, and unearthly shimmer generates a profusion bordering on decay. This alienation from the baroque original is supported by the apparent erosion of the brooch's myriad edges, eating away at the piece's powerful façade.

Taguchi received both his BFA and MFA in metal carving from the crafts department at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Other subdivisions of the crafts department at the university include metal hammering, metal casting, and Japanese lacquer (Urushi) art, all taught with a strong focus on skill and tradition, aiming for a deep understanding of material properties and processes. Classes in metal surface embellishment such as engraving,

Untitled (neck collar), 2012
gold, enamel, silver, rhodium plating
8 ¼ x 7 ⅞ x 1 ¾"

chasing, and inlay all begin with toolmaking prior to the introduction of technique, and only afterwards do they invite students to express themselves more creatively. During his studies Taguchi mastered the traditional metal carving technique of Wabori, which involves the use of tiny handmade chisels and hammers to engrave motifs into metal. For his later work he used a set of custom-designed chisels to develop his distinctive individual carving style.

Taguchi also apprenticed with preeminent Japanese goldsmith Yasuki Hiramatsu, who taught him the skills involved in jewelry fabrication. But more importantly Hiramatsu passed on his singular approach to making, which combined a restrained formal language with complex surface techniques, resulting in minimalist pieces that invite the light to play on the precious exterior and thus become a part of the work. Taguchi absorbed the stance of his master into his own compositions and describes it as a "subtraction of ideas," meaning that the work should singularly focus on one idea. It is with the help of superior craftsmanship that the work gains depth, or, in the words of Taguchi: "We have to be skillful in order to make shapes simple."

This search for simplicity is exemplified by the pieces he created prior to the work shown at "Schmuck," such as *Winding*, made in 2012. Graceful strips of silver or gold elegantly embrace the wrist or neck, their insides highly polished, their surfaces covered with the iridescence of multitudes of tiny carved craters. While employing a more conventional and somewhat predictable jewelry style in these pieces, the dialogue between the sparse visual language of their forms and the craftsmanship and attention to detail evident on their surfaces creates an interesting tension, while stopping short of reaching the transcendence of his later work.

The forms Taguchi employs in the pieces from the "White Countenance" group appear rooted in European design idiom, with their strong axial symmetry, formal elements of stylized lions and skulls, and decorative abundance. This work places Taguchi in the trajectory of contemporary jewelry in Japan, which has established strong connections to

"We have to be skillful in order to make shapes simple."

2400mm (bracelet), 2014
silver, paint
3 x 3 x 2 ½"
COURTESY MICHEKO GALERIE

Fukuramukatachi (Expanding Shapes)
(bracelet and ring), 2013
bracelet: silver, rhodium plating, 5 ½ x 5 ½ x 2 ⅜"
ring: 18k gold, 1 ¼ x 1 ¼ x ½"

Europe over the last five decades. Traditionally jewelry in Japan had been viewed as merely an accessory to fashion, with its skill set rooted in swordmaking and hollowware. The 1960s placed Japan under a strong influence of Scandinavian and European design and its quest for a quiet simplicity. The foundation of the Japan Jewelry Designers Association at that time introduced the concept of artistic expression in jewelry format and promoted its independence from fashion. Later developments saw an increased openness to alternative materials and fine arts practices, in combination with a reinterpretation of traditional Japanese craft practices such as metal carving and Urushi art, establishing a distinctive Japanese position in contemporary jewelry by the 1990s. Taguchi's mentor Hiramatsu had been at the forefront of these developments, nurturing close friendships with European jewelers such as Onno Boekhoudt and Hermann Jünger, and spending two years teaching at the Royal College of Art in London. Although Hiramatsu passed away in 2012, it was in his spirit that Taguchi went on his first journey outside of Japan later that year. His visit to Berlin, Dresden, and Munich provided him with the visual source material for the work he presented to the jury at "Schmuck" only a year after his return.

This trip opened Taguchi's mind to new influences and allowed him to partially abandon his self-imposed rule of subtraction by allowing additional ideas into his work. This change is evident the pendants included in the exhibition "Im Dialog mit dem Barock" ("In Dialogue with the Baroque"), in one of the baroque palaces near Munich in the fall of 2013. Some of the elements may have been directly inspired by the wrought-iron gates of one of Munich's beer gardens, and gone is the simplicity of his previous pieces. Those pendants come to life with the juxtaposition of historic German ornamentation and traditional Japanese craftsmanship; the conversation between complexity of design and surface embellishment results in pieces that reside outside of either country of origin.

Taguchi's return to Munich for "Schmuck 2014" came with an invitation to participate in a group exhibition at gallery Micheko, alongside Akiko Kurihara of Japan and Sungho Cho of Korea. The conceptual theme of mass (measurement) led Taguchi to investigate units of weight, length, and electrical power. Framed by old-fashioned measuring sticks were

Kuchitehazimari
(Beginning at When it is Rotten)
(pendant/ brooch), 2015
iron, urushi, soil
4 ⅜ x 3 ⅜ x 1 ⅜"

Kuchitehazimari
(Beginning at When it is Rotten)
(necklace), 2015
iron, urushi, soil
4 ⅜ x 2 x ¾"

necklaces in the form of light bulbs, with hand-pierced and -carved precious metal lettering replacing the electrical wires inside, and silver bracelets and pins with elongated hexagonal links arranged in the shape of a digital number display.

A group of pendants and cuff bracelets titled *Fukuramukatachi (Expanding Shapes)* demonstrates Taguchi's conceptual prowess as well as his technical versatility. In this oeuvre Taguchi applied his considerable understanding of metal properties to creating what looks like inflatables from metal tubing with a wall thickness of only 0.2mm (or 32 gauge). These pieces most closely investigate the theme of measurement by subverting the notion of size as being directly related to weight. Having first carved the inside of the tubes, Taguchi was able to bend them at the scored lines, creating wrinkles as the metal folded in on itself. Some of those metallic balloons were created in aluminum or bronze finished with a shallow matte texture; some are covered in primary colors; while others are gleaming from rhodium plating. The intricacy of their making is disguised by their cartoonish elementary shapes, which appear more rooted in Japanese subculture than centuries-old craft traditions.

Taguchi's latest work, titled *Kuchitehazimari (Beginning at When it is Rotten)*, is included in "Schmuck" this year. With this group Taguchi returns to the baroque forms of his earlier work, but with an unexpected twist: Instead of precious metal he used iron sheets as his medium, then pierced his forms and buried them in a field for a month. This exposure to the elements caused a layer of rust to form, replacing the hands of the craftsman with the signs of time passing and producing his desired result. Accepting the work of the soil on the metal, Taguchi then covered the rusty surfaces with Urushi lacquer. This traditional Japanese technique involves the repeat application of wafer-thin layers of tree sap collected form the Urushi tree to an object. As a result the object gets covered in a semitransparent shell of great visual depth, which would typically be augmented by the addition of dyes like iron oxide or cinnabar resulting in black or red hues. Taguchi, however, employed a subdued color palette of greens, browns, yellows, and blues, with the reddish shade of rust showing in the recesses of his complex designs. Both the replacement of the sparkly surface with dull monochrome

Kuchitehazimari
(Beginning at When it is Rotten) (necklace), 2015
iron, urushi, soil
4 ¾ x 2 ¾ x 1"

color, and the fact that the central oval cameos are devoid of decorations much like empty mirrors, give the pieces a more somber appearance than their shiny predecessors.

Taguchi explains the poetic background of these pieces as his imagining his jewelry as fermenting and ripening beneath the earth. The pieces are brimming with energy and vitality, much like a good wine gaining character as it matures in the cellar (in Japanese the word for sleep and fermentation is the same, implying the restorative nature of time in both cases). Allowing the metal to rust speaks to the delicate balance between the course of nature affecting an object created by the human hand, and the control this hand exerts over the object. The application of Urushi, which also has properties as a preservative, seems to give human intervention the upper hand, a position that is hardly surprising given the many hours Taguchi spent in the creation of this work.

Emanating from the confident position of contemporary jewelry in Japan, his blend of classic Japanese technique with European style places his work beyond concepts of East and West.

The past several years have seen Fumiki Taguchi master a multitude of processes, tightly connected to a disciplined development of ideas. Emanating from the confident position of contemporary jewelry in Japan, his blend of classic Japanese technique with European style places his work beyond concepts of East and West. It remains to be seen what is next for Taguchi; it may involve more traditional processes repurposed: it may lead to exploration of other forms; but it will, in the end, always be simple.

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DAUVITT ALEXANDER
Luckenbooth, 2014
Iron, silver, garnet white topaz, and polycarbonate
5 ½ x 3 x ¾"
PHOTO: ANDREW NEILSON, NEILSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Fashioning Function Redefining the Belt Buckle

BY EMILY STOEHRER

NASH QUINN
Lips, 2012
copper, nickel
2 x 2 ½ x 1"
PHOTO: NASH QUINN

Belt buckle inscribed for Nefertari,
1295–1186 B.C.
silver, gold, feldspar,
carnelian, blue frit, glass
1 ⅞ x 4 ½"
EMILY ESTHER SEARS FUND
PHOTOGRAPH © MUSEUM OF
FINE ARTS, BOSTON

FEDOR RUCKERT FOR FABERGÉ
Belt Buckle, 1908-14
silver gilt, enamel
2 ½ x ¼"
GIFT OF MRS. EUSTACE STRONG
IN MEMORY OF HER MOTHER,
MARY K. WELLS
PHOTOGRAPH © MUSEUM OF
FINE ARTS, BOSTON

"LUXURY IS A NECESSITY that begins where necessity ends," quipped iconic fashion designer Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. Not just for superheroes and cowboys, belt buckles have had a long history of marrying elegant design and functionality. While they play a role in holding your pants up, it's not the first thing that comes to mind when looking at certain works of art created by contemporary jewelers: These belt buckles are indeed functional, but nonetheless luxury items. With a history that spans nearly 6,000 years, belts have served a variety of real and imagined uses and they continue to have complex and layered meanings today.

Positioned above the groin, the belt and its adorned buckle act as a symbol of power, at times closely connected to status or culture, but they can also serve as indicators of avant-garde taste. While the belt is a gender-neutral object today, its history is rooted in menswear and it continues to be one of the few pieces of "jewelry" that men are comfortable wearing. For women, the belt has aided in deciphering the fashionable silhouette, but at the end of the 19th century, as women adopted elements of menswear for themselves, the appropriation of the belt and a sizable buckle drew renewed attention to the waist.

Like the brooch, the belt buckle offers a large open space upon which an artist can create a narrative. Contemporary artists have revived this fashion, exploring the ornament's traditional roots and creating new, more playful meanings. Art historian and fashion theorist Anne Hollander observed in her book *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress:* "Fashion instantly mocks sensible inventions in clothing, subjecting them to unfunctional usage as soon as they appear." Belt buckles and other practical forms of dress, says Hollander, "are no sooner put into use than put into play."

Recently, Stephen J. Dubner, co-author of the popular economics book *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, asked his podcast listeners why the belt has proven more enduring than the more useful suspenders. Dubner argued that belts don't really hold pants up the way suspenders do, and are rather a "sartorial accessory" meant to complete an ensemble. A powerful communicator, the belt buckle acts like any other statement jewel in its heightened visibility and panache.

Among the earliest examples of belt ornaments in the Museum of Fine Art, Boston's collection are ancient excavated finds from Egypt and Nubia, and early Asian buckles. These ornaments decorated utility belts that assisted in securing things to the body. Like pockets and handbags today, the belt was used as a way to keep the hands free while carrying necessary objects. Belts secured swords, visible displays of gentlemanly stature. Intricately designed and elaborately decorated pomanders hung from Renaissance girdles and held spices to ward off disease and unpleasant odors. Metal chatelaines hooked to women's belts and, like the modern-day Swiss Army Knife, concealed a variety of tools; and like a toggle, miniature sculptures known as netsuke were originally

GEORGES FOUQUET
Belt Buckle with Two Peacocks, ca. 1900
silver, gold, feldspar, carnelian, blue frit, glass, gold, enamel
3 x 2 x ½"
PRIVATE COLLECTION
COURTESY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

FALIZE FRÈRES
Belt Buckle, (from demi-parure), 1900
gold, enamel
2 ¼ x 2 ⅜"
PHOTO: WARTSKI LTD.

designed to secure the sash in traditional Japanese dress. But unlike these historical belt ornaments, the buckle withstood the test of time.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, buckles were commonly part of large suites of jewelry, but today they function more as a fashion accessory than a jewel. The New York–based jewelry designer Alexandra Mor asks, "Where did it get lost?" Three years ago Mor was commissioned to reimagine some antique jade jewelry into a thoroughly modern statement piece. After looking at the jade pieces and talking with the client, she proposed a belt buckle. Not a cowboy-style buckle; rather, a "more feminine" buckle with a custom-made belt that could be easily paired "with a dress or a big chunky cashmere sweater"—a real jewel. The resulting design featured the jade set in gold and platinum, with diamonds and pearls. She even found a small atelier in New York that custom made a crocodile skin belt for the gallant belt buckle.

Not just for superheroes and cowboys, belt buckles have had a long history of marrying elegant design and functionality.

Now a ubiquitous unisex accessory, the modern belt is rooted in men's dress in the first decades of the 20th century. As women adopted separates, pairing skirts with shirtwaist blouses, they also required a belt to complete the look, rather than hold the skirt in place. Belt buckle designs reflected larger artistic movements in their subject matter, and well-known artists and workshops produced belt buckles on both sides of the Atlantic. By the 1920s even Cartier Paris sold jeweled belt buckles and brooches

ALEXANDRA MOR
Untitled, 2013
gold, antique jade,
pearl, diamonds
4 ½ x 3"
PHOTO: RUSSELL STARR,
STARR DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

intended to adorn the low-waisted garçonne styles of the day. Cartier also retailed a men's watch belt buckle specially designed for the golf course, where a wristwatch might be damaged from the "shock" of the swing. Like the belt buckles crafted today, adornment trumped functionality.

Belt buckles, prominently placed on the center of the body, easily operate as status symbols. Rodeo, fishing, and other competitions have long awarded buckles to winners, like trophies. An obvious source of pride, these large-scale buckles would be worn for dressy occasions in the American West and would have been instantly recognizable to those with similar interests. During the '30s and '40s, Hollywood had a role in popularizing the accessory, as cowboys were rarely seen on screen without a prominent belt and equally matched buckle.

The belt buckle is an essential part of the laid-back uniform of the American West. While traditional turquoise, feather, snake, and cattle motifs are still pervasive, some artists have pioneered a more modern aesthetic. The Native American jeweler and metalsmith Pat Pruitt explains that "every guy who wears Levi's wears a belt buckle." While Pruitt's would-be clients may initially associate the belt with functionality, his challenge is getting them to realize that even functional objects can be beautifully made.

Belt buckles, prominently placed on the center of the body, easily operate as status symbols.

"People want to adorn themselves," Pruitt explains. But while most men in the West wear bolo ties, watches, and belt buckles, few other than "buckle aficionados" consider the accessory

a piece of jewelry. By combining innovative materials (like stainless steel, titanium, and carbon fiber) with cutting-edge design technology, Pruitt redefines these emblems of masculine culture.

Pruitt and his brother Chris, a lapidary artist, create belt buckles that are inspired by their interests and their environment in Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico. It's easy to see that these buckles, with their gas peddle shape, flames and tire tread marks, and titles like *Hot Rod and Go Fast* are heavily influenced by car culture. Inlays of turquoise and coral and titanium Moku-ti add color and visual interest to his designs, and their incorporation on buckles in stylized spider and scorpionlike shapes recalls the themes and wildlife of the American West.

Like Pruitt, Dauvit Alexander combines tradition and technology in his work. Inspired by the work of Robert Ebendorf, the Scottish jeweler infuses Victorian sentiment by using found materials with a storied past. Like much of his work, his *Luckenbooth* belt buckle is "all about taking abandoned materials and equipment and repurposing it into something unexpected," he says. Alexander cut up an old iron toolbox to create the background of the buckle, and constructed a garnet and silver frame with antlers to surround the traditional luckenbooth design (a double heart and crown motif favored by jewelers on Edinburgh's Royal Mile). The polycarbonate hearts are also made of refuse and were cut from a discarded sign. Using unexpected materials to create a traditional look, Alexander pays homage to Scottish jewelry history and neo-gothic styles favored by fashion designers like Alexander McQueen. His technique similarly "blurs boundaries" by combining handcraftsmanship and digital design technologies.

Both Pruitt and Alexander design buckles they would like to wear. Alexander explains that large buckles such as *Luckenbooth* are part of traditional Scottish dress. When worn with a kilt, Alexander describes a certain nonchalance that's required to complete the look. Worn "loosely at the front" or draped to the side, the custom belt, typically made by an Edinburgh leatherworker, holds the kilt in place. Alexander states that there is "nothing gendered" about the way his work "interfaces with the body," although it was made for men. As Pruitt endeavors to entice men with his designs, Alexander acknowledges that it's often women who purchase and wear his work.

In the late '60s and '70s, as unisex fashions emerged and more women embraced wearing pants, designers like Elsa Peretti, who was making accessories for the New York–based designers Giorgio di Sant' Angelo and Halston, designed belts and buckles. Peretti's snakes, stylized horseshoes, and hearts in jade, ivory, and silver added flair to minimalist disco-era fashions. Paired with solid-colored maxidresses and jumpsuits, they were a focal point. Sold with interchangeable leather belts, Peretti's designs for Halston were versatile and appealing to women interested in a more casual look. In 1974, as Tiffany & Co.

PAT PRUITT
AND CHRIS PRUITT
Untitled, 2014
Zirconium, turquoise, coral
4 ⅛ x 2 ⅛"
PHOTO: PAT PRUITT

LOUISE MUELLER
Our Hero, 1966
silver, enamel
2 ½ x 3 x ½"
THE DAPHNE FARAGO COLLECTION; REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION. PHOTOGRAPH © MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

ELSA PERETTI
Snake Head Belt, ca. 1970
ivory, coral, leather
MUSEUM PURCHASE WITH FUNDS DONATED ANONYMOUSLY
PHOTOGRAPH © MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

AMELIA TOELKE
Six Buckles, 2004
brass, enamel
4 x 2 ¾"
PHOTO: AMELIA TOELKE

The belt buckle simultaneously provides both sexes with a space for art, design, and whimsy.

first launched a collection with Peretti, fans lined up to buy her designs, and *Vogue* announced that "what had been a cult-sized ardor exploded into a national passion." More than 40 years later, Tiffany & Co. still retails the sterling silver snake, heart, and *Equestrian* belts that Peretti first designed in the 1970s. Peretti offers a softer, curvilinear sensibility to the traditionally hard-edged belt.

With so many rugged designs in contemporary belt buckles, the work of Amelia Toelke stands out in its femininity. Tolke's oval buckles with scalloped edges frame enamel patterns taken from graphic textile designs. She comments that the buckles, which she made in 2004, "say nothing but something at the same time." They offer a blank space to frame something that she believes deserves more attention than it's usually given. Who designed these patterns? Where did they come from—a bedsheet, a tablecloth, a favorite shirt?

Some artists can't help but poke fun at the proximity of a belt buckle to the genitals. Metalsmith Tom Muir calls the belt buckle a "site-specific type of art." Known primarily as a vessel maker, over the last few years Muir has been experimenting with buckles. For "Naughty Narratives: Lives Revealed," an exhibition and symposium at East Carolina University in 2015, Muir created the hot-pink starburst *Star-Nosed Mole Belt Buckle* (and he has since made the copper *Pig Snout Belt Buckle*, which he paired with a pink pigskin belt). The buckles are modeled on actual animal noses and then fabricated using a combination of digital and traditional metalsmithing techniques. Straddling the world of traditional buckles, which often features animal-themed motifs, and artfully considering the body's passageways—that he describes as cavities into the unconscious—Muir beautifully conjures sensuality in his belt buckle designs.

Lips by Nash Quin similarly explores passageways, while creating a narrative around the placement of the belt buckle on the human body. Unlike Muir's noses, which are stylized and abstracted, there is no denying the suggestiveness of these life-like lips. Nash, who grew up in the West's belt-buckle tradition, sought to make something he could see himself wearing, but at the same time he couldn't resist playing with what he describes as the "virtuosity and absurdity" of the belt buckle.

These contemporary jewelers and metalsmiths successfully create belt buckles that act as both an element of fashion and a purposeful object. As it has for millennia, the belt buckle simultaneously provides both sexes with a space for art, design, and whimsy.

Emily Stoehrer is the Rita J. Kaplan and Susan B. Kaplan Curator of Jewelry at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

TOM MUIR
Pig Snout Belt Buckle, 2014
copper, brass
4 x 5 ½ x 1 ⅜"
PHOTO: TIM THAYER

A selection of pieces from the Staffordshire Hoard as received by Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery prior to conservation.

Buried Treasure: The Staffordshire Hoard

BY MARTIN ELLIS

Cheek piece from a helmet.

Conservator Deborah Magnoler setting out the Staffordshire Hoard for the first grouping exercise.

THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM in the English Midlands has always been a metalworking town. In its beginnings in the Middle Ages, it was a center of ironworking. By the 1700s, it was the European capital of button-making and fancy metal goods. The growth of its jewelry industry and mass production brought wealth and renown in the Victorian period and stimulated a powerful reaction of craft metalworking in the early 20th century. Today the city is still a major hub of training, research, and innovation in jewelry and metals.

So it seems appropriate that in 2009 one of the most significant discoveries of early English jewelry and metalwork was made just a few miles north of city, in a field overlooking the ancient Roman road of Watling Street. It was a discovery that has cast a new light on the wealth of the Anglo-Saxon people, who were forging a new world in England in the sixth and seventh centuries AD, and, above all, on the extraordinary skill exhibited by the jewelers and goldsmiths who served the elite warrior class of this society.

The find, which became known as the Staffordshire Hoard, was made by Terry Herbert, a metal detectorist who had worked this particular field many times over the years. On the 5th of July, 2009, however, the earth seemed filled with gold, as piece after piece emerged from the soil. The site was excavated by regional archaeologists, the British Museum, and the British Government under a heavy veil of secrecy. Eventually, nearly 4,000 gold and silver items and fragments were recovered. Altogether, the gold weighed eleven and a half pounds, the silver nearly three and a half pounds. Never before had so large a deposit of material been found from one of the most shadowy periods of English history. The Staffordshire Hoard is now owned by the Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent City Councils and cared for on their behalf by Birmingham Museums Trust and The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.

In addition to its size, the hoard is unique in several ways. No other comparable deposit has ever been found. But perhaps most surprising was its actual composition. The great majority of the hoard comprised war gear: sword fittings, ornamental elements of two helmets (if not more), and decorative fittings assumed to have come from scabbards, shields and saddles, horse harness, straps, and buckles. There were a few items with Christian associations, including three crosses and possible elements of a book binding, as well as many unidentifiable fragments, but no coins, no domestic items, and—most notably—no items of personal adornment, no material associated with women. All of the items were deliberately damaged before burial. Many had been violently torn from their original locations, the gold bent and twisted, stone settings lost, silver cut into little shards. But, in spite of the damage, the exquisite workmanship is immediately apparent and of an extraordinary fineness. The hoard is particularly rich in gold filigree ornament, comprising wires rolled and twisted into decorative patterns and soldered to a golden

backplate; and in garnet-set cloisonné work, in which rhythmic patterns are built up of shaped slices of ruby-red garnet held in gold cells. The other great feature of the material is its elaborate and complex imagery of abstracted, biting, and writhing animals, fish, and birds, as well as formal interlace. The decoration is executed in a variety of techniques, including engraving and a few examples of niello-filled silver, as well as filigree and cloisonné. Although associated with military objects, this is clearly ornament of an intensely personal nature, to be studied and appreciated at close quarters. It is, in essence, jewelry.

One of the attractive things about the hoard is that it is wrapped in mystery. No one knows who buried it or why.

But what could this assemblage represent? It is as if the royal retinue and war leaders of an entire people had been stripped of their finery—which is perhaps the case. One of the attractive things about the hoard is that it is wrapped in mystery. No one knows who buried it or why. The period was certainly one of violent change and uncertainty. The

Gold sword collar showing extraordinarily fine filigree work.

Pectoral cross with gold filigree and cabochon garnet decoration.

Gold and garnet sword pommel, with foils visible both in the exposed cloison and through the garnets.

Helmet cheek-piece in silver with gilding and niello inlay.

Anglo-Saxons were a disparate group of peoples who began migration into England during the fifth and sixth centuries from southern Scandinavia, Holland, and northern Germany, and were part of the great Germanic diaspora that swept through Europe, from Spain to Sweden, as the Roman Empire collapsed. By the time the hoard was buried, some time in the middle of the seventh century, Britain was formed of a series of small kingdoms, divided by race and religion and in constant conflict. The Celtic British population wilted westwards under the force of an unstructured English invasion, while traditional Germanic paganism was challenged by an actively evangelical Christianity. The hoard, interestingly, was found at a meeting point of all these forces, in terms of date, culture, and geography, near the geographical center of Britain, and in the heartland of the last great pagan warrior king, Penda of Mercia.

The scale of the hoard is also a puzzle. As research into the content continues, it is becoming clear that many of the items in the hoard represent only part of objects that had been disassembled prior to burial. So what happened to the other parts? It is now suggested that the hoard represents only one element of a much larger assemblage, which was randomly divided into two, or even three separate deposits of treasure. If so, then the visible wealth of the royal houses and their retinues in Anglo-Saxon England must have been extraordinary. The epic poem *Beowulf*, whose earliest written elements date from the seventh century, provides an insight into this heroic warrior society. But it was thought that the poem's tales of gold-giving lords, buried treasure and precious, gold-adorned weapons were poetic exaggeration. The discovery and ongoing research into the hoard has utterly changed that perception.

Stylistically, the majority of objects in the hoard are firmly English, and of the late sixth to mid-seventh century. They are also evidence of a much freer and extensive international culture of trade and influence than is conventionally thought. The use of rich red garnets in a gold cloisonné setting seems to have originated in antiquity as a lapidary style of the eastern Roman

They are also evidence of a much freer and extensive international culture of trade and influence than is conventionally thought.

A gold filigree band of unknown function.

empire. It was a decorative technique favored in the jewelry of Gothic and Germanic tribes on the northern and western fringes of the empire, and is found in work from Visigothic Spain, the Frankish kingdoms of Merovingian Gaul, and as far north as southern Sweden. Analysis of the hoard's garnets by PIXE (particle-induced X-ray emission) at the Louvre Museum suggests that they were principally imported from Northern India, with some from what is now the Czech Republic.

As there are no natural deposits in England, the gold, too, was an exotic import. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries gold was flowing into England from the European mainland, largely in the form of gold coin. Some of this was no doubt looted. But Germanic mercenaries in the service of the eastern Roman Empire were paid in gold. Also, for a time, Frankish kingdoms were receiving extensive subsidies from Constantinople—wealth which readily found its way to cultural and dynastic allies across the English Channel.

In England, individual finds of garnet cloisonné and gold filigree work, including personal jewelry, have been excavated in burials from Kent in the southeast to Northumberland in the north, as well as occurring in chance finds. But the only truly comparable group of objects came from the royal ship burial at Sutton Hoo, in East Anglia, excavated in 1939, where, in a manner typical of Germanic pre-Christian burials, extensive grave goods were placed around the body. There, amongst other treasures, belt, scabbard, and sword fittings of exquisite workmanship made a powerful display of wealth, influence, and power. Until the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard, it was thought that the quality and sophistication, especially of the gold work, was largely without parallel. However, there are several close similarities of both imagery and technique between cloisonné and engraved gold objects in the hoard and those at Sutton Hoo—so much so that there are suggestions of a common workshop, or even individual goldsmith, working for different patrons within the social elite in the early 600s. A particularly rich effect shared by items in the Hoard and those at Sutton Hoo is that known as closed-cell cloisonné. In this technique, the cloisons flanking garnet-inlaid cells are closed off with a golden cover, so that the garnets appear to be set into solid gold.

A particular benefit of the hoard is that damaged and fragmentary objects provide an unequaled opportunity to study and analyze techniques of production.

A particular benefit of the hoard is that damaged and fragmentary objects provide an unequaled opportunity to study and analyze techniques of production.

Rectangular fitting of garnet cloisonné and gold, with serpent motif.

A hilt fitting, showing closed cell cloisonné with garnets.

Sword pommel cast in gold with figural animal ornament and black niello inlay.

Pyramid fitting in gold with garnet and glass cloisonné.

Gold and garnet sword mount in shape of a bird.

Gold and garnet finial of unknown function.

The Staffordshire Hoard Research Project, conducted by Barbican Research Associates, under the title *Contextualising Metal-detected Discoveries: the Staffordshire Anglo-Saxon Hoard,* and funded by Historic England and the owners, is actively ongoing, but has already greatly extended our understanding of early medieval jewelry. Using high-resolution stereo and 3D microscopes, as well as spectrographic analysis, the program is revealing an astonishing precision of manufacture. For jewelers with limited technology and no visual aids, it is almost unbelievable. The fine detail and delicacy of construction of the golden elements of the hoard are largely dependent on the ductility of gold and its capability of being beaten into thin sheets, which can then be further manipulated to form wire or strips.

The Research Programme provides regular online information about progress in cleaning and analyzing the hoard. A blog by Brian Castriota outlines the construction of a typically fine cloisonné piece. A gold backplate was marked out with the pattern of the cloisons. Then, using gold strip a mere five-thousandths of an inch thick, the jeweler created the series of shaped cloison "boxes" which would contain the garnet slices, soldering the strip to the backplate. The cloisons were then lined with a thin gold foil, and stamped with a waffle pattern, to reflect and scatter light back through the garnet, thus giving a brilliance to the stone. Once the garnets, shaped apparently by using an abrasive wheel, had been set, the top edges of the cloison strips were smoothed down, bending the strip over the garnets and creating a minute bezel to hold them in place. Filigree ornament is equally precise, using gold wire ranging in diameter from a few hundredths of an inch to a couple of thousandths. Wires are ribbed to create a beaded profile, twisted to create rope and feather patterns, and used in elaborate combinations, with beaded wires of larger diameters often flanked by fine wires to create a triple wire. A blog by the jeweler Jamie Hall, who has been able to study the hoard's filigree, suggests that the wire was handworked by being cut, rolled, and patterned with swages. The uses of the ornamental wire are manifold. Complex interlace patterns are built up by bending and butting short lengths of triple beaded wires, while comparatively large fields of filigree, soldered to a wafer-thin back plate, create the impression that objects are made out of a sheet of woven gold.

For jewelers with limited technology and no visual aids, the work is almost unbelievable.

In the most elaborate objects, several decorative techniques are used in combination, with garnet cloisonné enclosing panels of engraved and filigree ornament. This richness is not exclusive to the Staffordshire Hoard. A disc brooch, found in the grave of a woman at Kingston Down in Kent, now in the National Museums Liverpool, is equally elaborate, and includes some settings using blue glass in addition to garnet—a decorative element found rarely in the hoard, which contains very little glass. Two colors of gold are also used in some of the filigree work, with paler wires set against a deeper, richer backplate. At the time of this writing, analysis of both the gold and nature of the solder alloy is just beginning, but recent research at the British Museum has already made it clear that the goldsmith's manipulation of the gold alloy is remarkably sophisticated. It appears that, within a single strip or setting, the alloy is deliberately varied, with a higher purity of gold at the visible surface, and a heavier level of silver alloy towards the base. It is not yet known how this effect has been achieved.

The extent and quality of the material discovered in that Staffordshire field has already required us to re-evaluate many of our preconceptions and cast new light on the cultural accomplishment of the Dark Age. And we can now see that the interaction of a series of themes in one brief period in the late sixth and early seventh centuries—the jewelry traditions in late antiquity, an extensive international trade, the availability of gold, and a powerful Germanic tradition—produced one of the high points in the history of jewelry-making in England.

All images are reproduced courtesy of Birmingham Museums Trust.

Martin Ellis, a curator, lecturer, and broadcaster, was until 2015 Curator of Applied Art at Birmingham Museums Trust. He is a Freeman of the Goldsmiths' Company and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Birmingham Museums Trust is still actively fundraising for the Research Programme, which continues to provide us with amazing revelations about the skill of these anonymous craftsmen and women. Those wishing to contribute to this research can visit the museum-run site: https://www.justgiving.com/Staffordshire-Hoard/.

Reviews

Jewellery by Ai Weiwei: Rebar in Gold

Elisabetta Cipriani Gallery, London
November 12, 2015–January 16, 2016

by Norman Cherry

The practice of fine artists turning their hands to creating jewelry has a long history. Holbein the Younger did so; Dürer was trained as a goldsmith and engraver. In more recent times Rodin, Picasso, Braque, Ernst, Bourgeois, and Dalí (to name just some) did so with varying degrees of success and, one has to suggest, commitment. Of course Calder is often held up as the master who made jewelry in tandem with his wonderful large-scale sculptures, who did not necessarily separate that activity from his other endeavors. Much of the credit for showing the jewelry of fine artists or perhaps more accurately of showing jewelry as art rather than commercial product in the 20th century is given to Joan Sonnabend, the proprietor of Sculpture to Wear Gallery at the Plaza Hotel in New York during the early 1970s.

Since 2009 Elizabetta Cipriani has been doing something similar in London. Her gallery is on the first floor of a pretty unassuming building in a street better known for its restaurants. Entering the gallery, we find the main room dedicated to contemporary fine art with a generous space behind that for the jewelry shows. Her stable includes Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Erwin Wurm, and Rebecca Horn, among others. On the day I visited I was delighted to see works in the main gallery by Pedro Cabrita Reis, whose work I had last seen at a major exhibition at The Baltic, Gateshead several years ago, and who has also produced jewelry for the gallery.

The Ai Weiwei exhibition ran in parallel with his very well received major show at the Royal Academy, and needed to be viewed in conjunction with that. One of the rooms at the RA was filled with an incredibly powerful and almost awe-inspiring installation of 200 tons of recycled steel rebar, which the artist had purchased from the salvage company involved in clearing the site of the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan Province, China, in 2008. Seventy thousand people lost their lives that day, a distressingly high number of whom were children. The artist had been much moved by the loss and dedicated this installation to the catastrophe.

This installation was the catalyst for the jewelry on show at Elisabetta Cipriani. The constrained space volume within the second room of the gallery had been designed specifically to take just two showcases illuminated dramatically in an otherwise darkened space. These showcases were simple yet luxurious and made from Huali, the Chinese wood normally used for traditional furniture, and glass. Inside each was a single bangle of pure gold formed from rod cast to replicate rebar, and in one showcase the bangle was alongside a single short length of the material. As a contrast to the drama of the multi-room installation at the Royal Academy it certainly worked, and perhaps overcame the sense of disappointment I felt at seeing so few pieces. A video loop of Ai Weiwei forming the bangles played nearby.

So at least the artist was trying to make the work himself and not relying on some nameless background craftsperson. But it all seemed to me to be rather crude. This material is so soft, so malleable, so biddable, so tactile and warm; there is hardly any need for tools other than the hands, which can caress and persuade the metal to form almost any shape and form that you might want. These forms however were rudimentary and irregular. Is this because he has no feeling for the material, no empathy with it, no real interest in it? Apparently the customer is encouraged to form the bangle to fit his or her own wrist.

Given the artist's preoccupation with ethics, I was surprised that this fact did not seem to be an issue in his use of precious metal. His concern for the plight of the children lost in the earthquake did not seem to be matched by a concern for the environmental and health issues raised by commercial gold production. Since the London exhibition, he has closed his exhibition "Ruptures" in Denmark as

Installation view, "Jewellery by Ai Weiwei: Rebar in Gold," at Elisabetta Cipriani Gallery, 2015.

Rebar Bracelet, 2015
24k gold
dimensions variable

a protest against the Danish government's passing of new laws to take possessions from newly arrived migrants, and traveled to the Greek island of Lesbos, from where he has made pronouncements on the plight and treatment of the thousands of hapless refugees fleeing Syria and other would-be asylum seekers from elsewhere in the Middle East and Asia.

To the jewelry itself. Is it good? Is it sensitive, aesthetically pleasing or challenging, wearable, ugly, practical, useful? To my eye, it is just pretty uninteresting, a literal translation of a building component usually made from steel into one fashioned from the most precious metals known. Is it any different than some of the other "jewelry" created by or for known fine artists; any better than the most recent efforts by Zaha Hadid and Tracey Emin? Well, at least it eschews the indiscriminate use of diamonds scattered around like fairy dust by the other two, but I cannot really be convinced by this tiny neo-collection as serious jewelry. Had it the effect of reminding us forcefully of the ethical or humanitarian concerns so powerfully demonstrated at the RA, or even was fabulous sculpture to wear, I might have had a different reaction. As it is, it seems just a commercial enterprise by someone who doesn't seem to need the money.

I would love to have seen what he might have done with the original steel rebar: make it into jewelry or objects and sell it to raise money for the benefit of the tidal wave of refugees the civilized world is trying so hard (and not very effectively) to assist. I would have been one of the first customers.

Norman Cherry, an independent curator, consultant, and creator based in Birmingham, UK, is Visiting Professor at Nanjing Arts University, China.

Karl Fritsch: A Retrospective

Salon 94, New York, NY
October 26–December 18, 2015

by Andrea DiNoto

Coincidentally, and perhaps serendipitously for anyone who noticed, this show of starkly unconventional rings ran concurrently with the Museum of Modern Art's massive and illuminating "Picasso Sculpture" exhibition, and also with the American Folk Art Museum's "Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet." The synchronicity illuminated many of the shared approaches and philosophies of these earlier iconoclastic masters with those of the contemporary jeweler Karl Fritsch. Fritsch's work, like theirs, appears at once spontaneous and raw, improvisatory and intentionally anti-art, yet is decidedly conceptual to those ends. All of these qualities were immediately apparent in the show's installation, designed by Fritsch, in which dozens of crudely formed wax-cast gold and silver (and also carved aluminum) rings were stuck on a narrow wooden, roughly 15-foot-long plank coated with black plasticine, so as to elevate the objects to eye level with no impeding barrier. This insured an intimate viewer experience, in which no detail of construction could escape the inquiring eye. One group of rings literally addressed the viewer, as they spelled out "Hi!" in letters made from crudely formed

Installation view, "Karl Fritsch: A Retrospective," at Salon 94, 2015.

low-karat gold bars set with colored stones, much in the style of childish printing. Just as Dubuffet famously anthropomorphized art itself ("Art doesn't go to sleep in the bed made for it…") Fritsch imbues his rings with personalities, as he states: "Sometimes a ring plays a joke on me, or it sits at the table like a good child, doing nothing." And Fritsch, like Picasso, takes a deceptively casual approach to the creation of forms and the application of color. In Fritsch's case, crude metal sculptures are enlivened with equally crudely inset precious stones resembling, in a way, Picasso's off-hand daubs on metal. Also like Picasso, Fritsch incorporates found objects both in a spirit of play and to aestheticize the commonplace. Some rings support clusters of screws and nails as schrapnel-like jewels; many are meta-castings of traditional rings, some of which are set with brutalized stones. And Fritsch's series of appealingly off-kilter smiley-face rings, formed from silver or gold slabs roughly inset with precious stones, seemed to be saying to Dubuffet's iconic flat, tortured images: "Cheer up, we're in this together."

Urgency and immediacy characterize many of Fritsch's forms, to the degree that his fingerprints are evident on much of his castings, be they massive or delicate. It's as if, with childlike enthusiasm, he couldn't wait a minute to capture the moment of creation intact, rather an unusual approach for a classically trained jeweler (Goldsmiths' School, Pforzheim, Germany; Academy of Fine Arts, Munich). It is only on close inspection that you realize Fritsch is in fact referencing traditional jewelry forms, styles, and techniques (e.g., niello) that he values. Solitaires abound (one work features a laser-drilled rough diamond impaled on a nail); there are rings with platforms supporting golden balls, cubes, and faceted real or faux gems; and there are towering stacks and burgeoning clusters of colored glass stones. In one eye-dazzling example, a ring explodes with delicate rods of various semiprecious stones left over from bead drilling. The show's pièce de resistance is a towering gold ring cast from bubblegum into a high tangle of ribbons: at $18,000, it was the show's most impressive and costly object.

"Bubblegum" ring, 2006
18k gold
4 ⅜ x 2 ⅛ x 1 ½"

Smiley Face (ring), 2014
silver, sapphire, cubic zirconia

Although this show was described as a retrospective, none of Fritsch's functional objects, such as sculptural spoons, bowls, and candlesticks, were included. This was perhaps for the best because it is the rings that reveal Fritsch operating in his most brilliant, antic mode and with the greatest freedom and variety of forms. This collection was an exhilarating, memorable performance that hopefully will come round again. An encore may be just what these rings need because, as Fritsch reports (as quoted on the gallery's website):

The ring is desperate, desperate to find a finger, desperate to tell you: I love you, I am beautiful, I am rich, I am cool, I hate you, I come from Ireland or Austria, I want more, I have enough, I am married, I am funny, I am scary, stupid, important, I can´t help you. I am.

Andrea DiNoto is a New York–based writer on art, craft and design.

Helena Johansson Lindell

Velvet da Vinci,
San Francisco, CA
November 4–December 6, 2015

by Anton Stuebner

Helena Johansson Lindell's work is suffused with a deliberately Pop aesthetic of candy colors and prefabricated materials. Although intended for wear, her necklaces and earrings are more like miniature sculptures, strange hybrids of reclaimed plastics, metal findings, and discarded wooden objects found at junk shops and flea markets. In juxtaposing the mass-produced with the handcrafted, Lindell exhibits an almost Warholian keenness for reappropriating kitsch as art, and recurring visual allusions to children's toys and pill capsules evoke lowbrow and even lurid associations. But if Lindell's work gleefully revels in the garish, it also raises more trenchant questions about the assumed parameters between fine and vernacular art, while forcing us to confront our all-too-pervasive culture of consumerism and waste.

A 2014 recipient of the Swedish Arts Grant for International Cultural Exchange, Lindell has received extensive acclaim for her innovative ability to reconstruct previously discarded materials into new and remarkably sensual forms. Velvet da Vinci's recent exhibition marks the artist's first solo show in the United States, and it's a stunning debut. Installed across multiple displays throughout the gallery, the 15 works on view are largely organized in mismatched pairs. Necklaces rendered in similar palettes and shapes appear alongside one another and, from a distance, even seem like exact duplicates. The two necklaces

strung on teal marine cord in *Necklaces (purple/yellow, teal cord)*, for instance, are almost identical, their two-toned violet and periwinkle pendants hanging from similarly orange-sherbet hued plastic t-bars. Closer examination, however, reveals distinct aberrations: a faint scratch in the periwinkle finish or a frayed stretch of friction-worn cord. These distortions become as important to Lindell's work as they were in Warhol's Campbell's Soup can canvases. In revealing the imperfections that distinguish an individual work from the set, Lindell challenges our conception of the "copy" by drawing attention to the subtle traces left behind on her materials. But whereas the offset marks in Warhol's work signaled the impossibility of exact reproducibility, the scuffs and rough edges in Lindell's jewelry function as metonyms for the artist's hand and the painstaking craftsmanship required to assemble each unique piece.

It's difficult to fully appreciate Lindell's pieces until you feel their surfaces. Running your index finger across the edge of the capsule-shaped pendants of *Necklaces (purple/red/wood)*, for example, reveals a staggering array of sensations: the smooth finish of hand-planed wood giving way to the cold start of a thick aluminum band punctuated by the rough porousness of a curved plastic dome. Lindell's pieces are a marvel of construction, with few obvious joints or seams, and their formal playfulness belies their almost startling sensuality. In playing off the tropes of kitsch versus craft, Lindell encourages us to reconsider the assumed boundaries of high and low art. But in drawing us in with those critical conceits, she also reminds us that jewelry only comes "alive" once it's worn. Our bodies transform these peculiar little assemblages into objects of adornment. And that's the sneaky brilliance of Lindell's work: just as she gets us in our heads, she takes us out again and reconnects us with our sensations, each piece triggering a unique perceptual experience that's *meant* to be felt. Suddenly, the soft curve in a pendant shaped like a toddler's rattle in *Necklaces (blue)* begins to resemble more feminine forms, an elegant reminder that Lindell's work is always imagined in proximity and reference to the body.

There is also an environmental significance to Lindell's use of reclaimed materials, and her imaginative ability to repurpose previously discarded objects could be seen as a lesson in sustainable design. Lindell tellingly avoids making any overtly political statements about her work, and her pieces at Velvet da Vinci are generically titled based on material and color, a gesture that evokes an almost deliberate ambiguity. But all of the themes at play in Lindell's work—of doubling and replication, and an indexical relationship to the body—poetically re-emerge in the exhibition's largest installation: a large-scale rendering of one of Lindell's pendants, suspended from the ceiling over a rounded mirrored surface. Staring into the mirror, the massive pendant precariously hanging overhead, creates a stunning moment of convergence. The boundaries between our bodies and Lindell's work blur, if only for a brief, reflective moment.

Necklaces (purple/yellow, teal cord), 2015
plastic, textile, aluminum
16 ½ x 3 ½ x 1 ⅛"

Installation view, "Helena Johansson Lindell" at Velvet da Vinci, 2015.

Anton Stuebner is a San Francisco–based arts writer.

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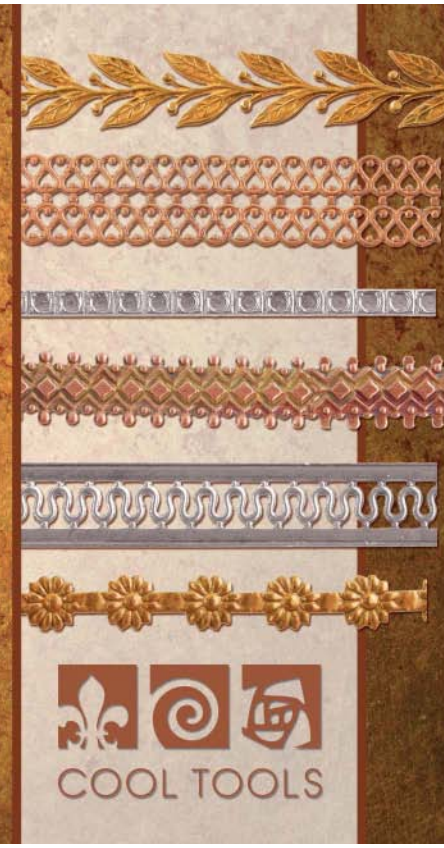

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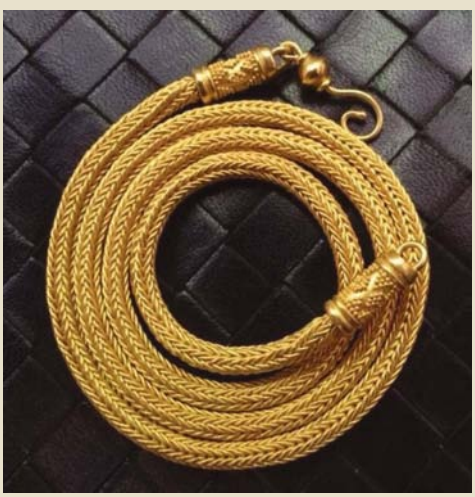

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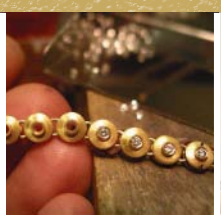

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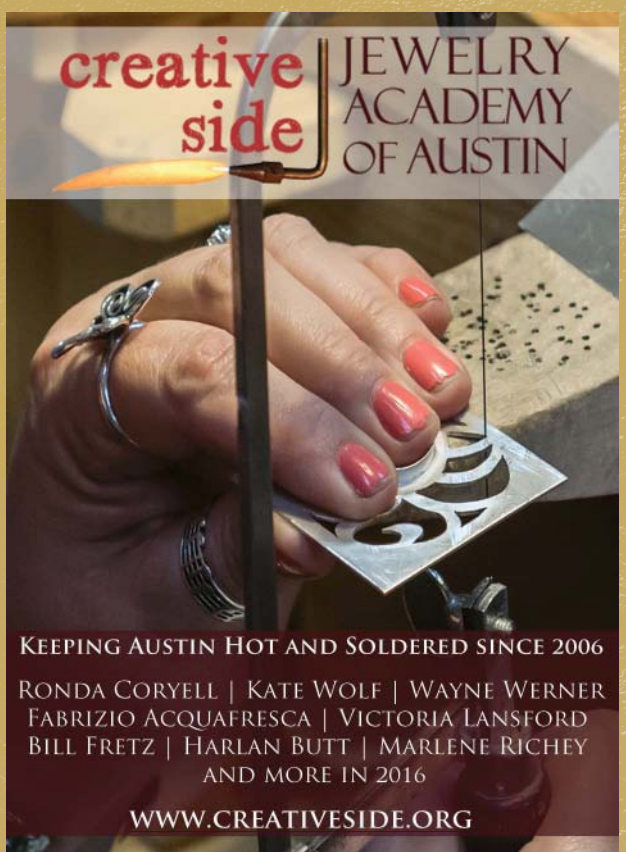
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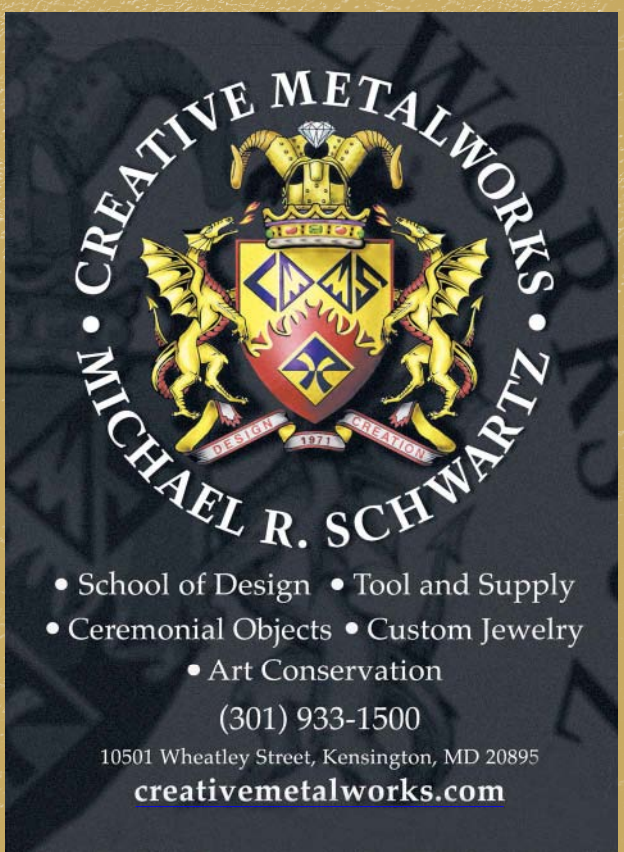
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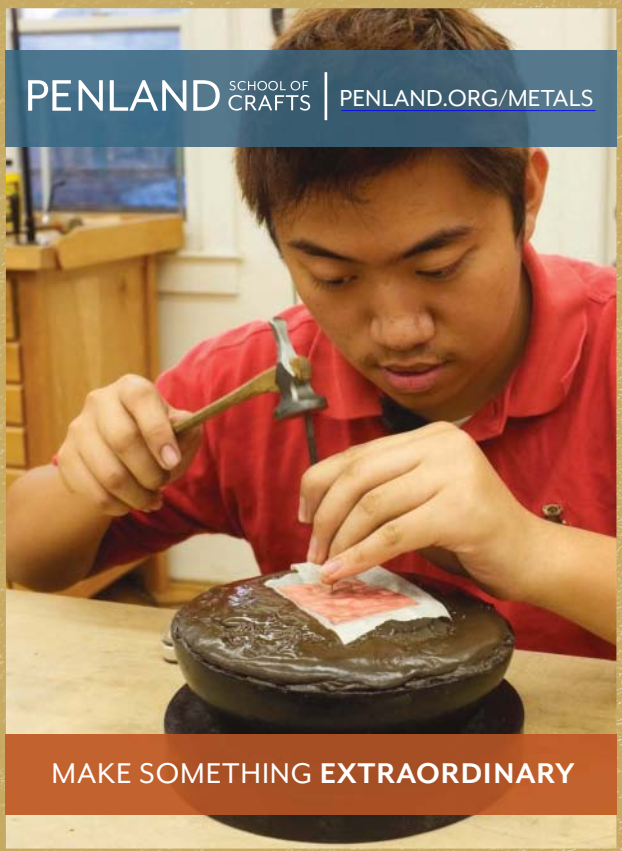

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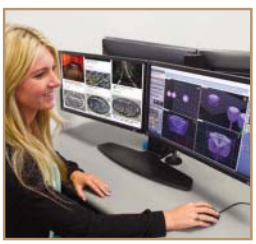

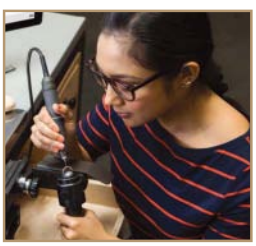

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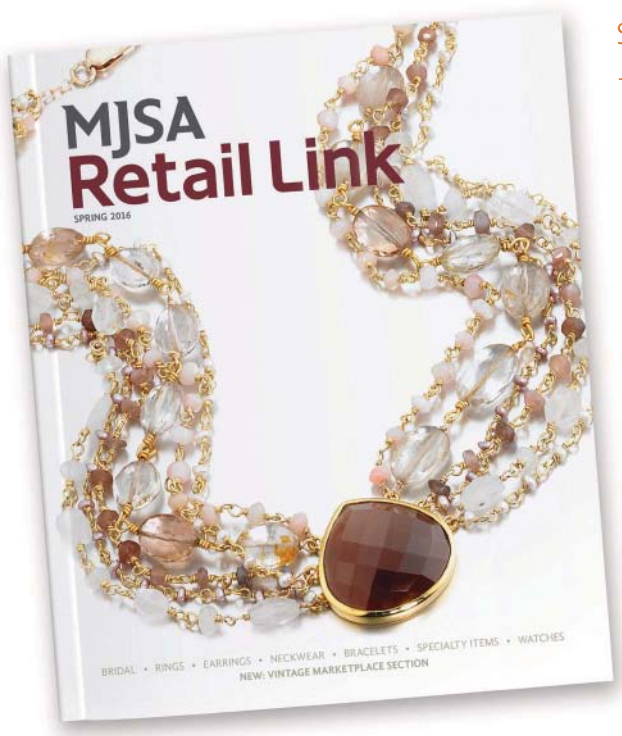
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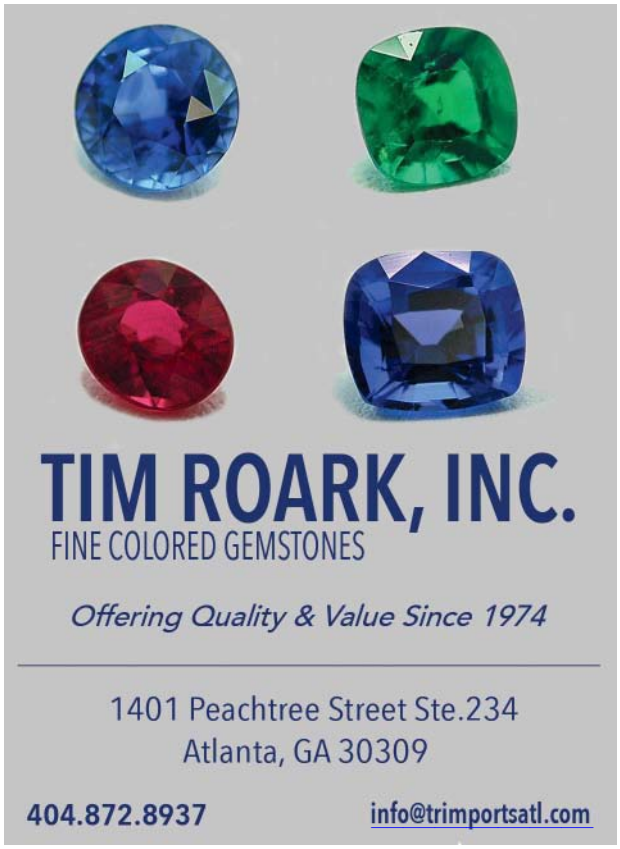

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